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WHAT NEXT?

BY

DENIS MACKAIL

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN COMPANY
1921

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TO DIANA

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time and place, to-day after looking fixedly and fiercely at it he replaced it loose in his waistcoat pocket; and in the second place although he turned, as he turned every day, towards the green baize board on which was displayed the tape machine's version of the latest racing results, on this occasion instead of stopping in front of it he passed on towards a dark alcove under the stairs in which had been exhibited from time immemorial a large-scale map of London.

So long had this map been hanging in this alcove that it would now better have served as a guide to Dickens' London than as a means of conveying information remotely accurate to present-day topographical enquirers. During the course of ages its ink had become paler and its varnish browner, and but a ghost remained of the blue circle which had once represented the bounds of what was known to our ancestors as the four-mile radius. Age and infirmity, moreover, were not the only handicaps under which this map laboured as a purveyor of knowledge; for during the passage of years it had become partially eclipsed by certain articles hanging from a row of hooks over it—a long-handled clothes-brush, a hunting crop, and an indescribably ancient and once white silk scarf straggled across its face. It is a tradition of the Port Club that whatever a member has once hung up on a hook or peg shall remain there until he or his heirs shall remove it; and though it is difficult to explain the

presence of the hunting crop, it is perhaps easier than to account for the cork helmet which has languished on one of the higher hooks in the cloakroom proper since before the memory of the oldest member, or the assegai which has for decades been a lurking menace to members using that little-known umbrella-stand on the way to the telephone boxes.

Mr. Grant paused in front of this map and gazed intently and wonderingly at it with his mouth slightly open. A suspicion of a frown appeared on his pleasant countenance and at one moment he gingerly moved the silk scarf to one side ; but the object of his search seemed to elude him. So long did he stand in this studious reverie and so unwonted an action was it for any member of the Club to consult this ancient map, that Parish, in his box by the door, whose interest had been but mildly roused by the cigarette incident, actually rose from his perch and leant over his diminutive counter in an attempt to obtain a closer view of Mr. Grant's activities. At this moment the pleasant mouth closed with an unexpected snap and its owner turned suddenly and resolutely towards the hall door—so suddenly, indeed, that Parish, leaning well over the front of his box, was in the greatest danger of feeling for an instant undignified ; a horrible sensation which he had never experienced since the unfortunate incident of Lord Pargeter and the Abyssinian cheese in 1898 (the incident is referred to in the great scientist's biography)—and was only saved from

While he is in the street it would be interesting to look at the letter headed "Canterbury House, Great Bilberry Street" which Jim is still holding in his hand. In doing so we shall be but following the example of the great Parish, whose skill in reading upside-down had been acquired by years of practice in deciphering notes, cheques and I O U's which members were in the habit of writing on the ledge of his hutch on their way in and out of the Club.

"Canterbury House, Great Bilberry Street," said the letter and added the date. It then proceeded :—

"DEAR SIR,

Re Sir Alfred Ernest Pooley deceased.

"We should be obliged if you could make it convenient to call here at half past three o'clock p.m. on Thursday next the 27th inst.

"Yours faithfully,

"PUXLEY, SONS AND BIMBERTON."

The appearance which this communication bore of having been left out in a rainstorm and subsequently dried by passing through a mangle was sufficient evidence to Parish that it had come from a solicitor's office. But what had interested him (as well as the real owner of the letter) most, was the underlined reference to Sir Alfred Ernest Pooley deceased.

For who in England, had not heard of Sir Alf

Pooley, the millionaire whose recent sudden death had filled the newspapers of the land with memoirs headed "From Pitboy to Palace"? (He had, it is true, been born in a mining-town but had known better than ever to descend a mine, while the Palace one imagines was merely meant to symbolise or typify his rise to riches, since he had never actually occupied a royal residence.) Parish certainly knew all this, and, knowing that Mr. Grant was the only nephew of the late Crœsus, jumped to the romantic conclusion that the letter in reading which he had just exercised his peculiar gifts had reference to certain testamentary dispositions on the part of the deceased.

The same conclusion had been reached by Jim several days ago, and if the heart of a member of the Port Club may for a moment be laid bare to the world, he had been awaiting his interview with Messrs. Puxley, Sons and Bimberton with considerable impatience.

Sir Alf had, in spite of a rugged and sometimes painfully straightforward manner to the world in general, always remained a good deal of a mystery to his nephew. In Jim's extreme youth he had played a very small part, existing more as a name than as a presence to his small nephew; but events had occurred which changed this. His father not having shared his uncle's distaste for mining as a profession had been buried by a fall of coal so soon after his marriage that Jim had no chance of being

anything but an only child. His mother had managed to keep herself and her baby going for seven or eight years, though it was a hard fight, and then just as it seemed as if her brother's success were going to make things easier for her at last, she died. This was a very few months after Sir Alf (then plain Mr.) Pooley had succeeded in bringing off the great Mustard Merger—the first big step in his financial career—and within a week of Mrs. Grant's death he had descended on the little mining-town and whisked his nephew off with him; and beginning at that moment Jim had been thrust into a succession of forcing-houses for the production of what Sir Alf had up to his dying day continued to call gents.

It would almost seem that Sir Alf, with the dreadful directness of thought which had served him so well in the City, had realised that the Mustard Merger had come too late in his own life to make it possible for the most expensive and powerful forcing-house to have any effect on himself, and had consequently determined to use some of his wealth to impose gentility on his nephew. It was all done in the most scientific, remorseless and effective way, and though the few who knew what was being attempted prognosticated the creation of an appalling social half-caste, it must be admitted that the forcing had been so far as it was possible to judge a complete success. Jim himself had come gradually to look back on his childhood first as a

dream, then as a dream that he had been told as having been dreamt by someone else, and had at length come to think of it with as much interest and attention as is commonly given by people to their social condition in a pre-natal existence.

There is no doubt that money could do as much for almost anyone as it had done for Jim provided that they were caught young enough and it was skilfully expended, and no further proof of the success of Sir Alf's plan could be required than his nephew's membership of the Port Club.

Other clubs might rise and fall; names famous in the eighteenth century might still impress Americans who did not know that they now cloaked limited liability companies; younger establishments might attempt to draw attention from their inclusiveness by the moral effect of their architectural grandiosity, but the Port Club was unique. It was not merely the inconvenience, gloom and uncleanliness of its premises;—other clubs could equal if not exceed these; it was not its antiquity, for it was barely a hundred years old. It was not the fame or rank of its members, for it conferred membership as a favour and was always completely satisfied that inclusion in its numbers was the equivalent of what is commonly valued as fame or rank elsewhere; no, the indescribable cachet of the Port Club has never been reduced to words. Let it merely be said that snobbery perished at its portals and exclusiveness blossomed within them

without knowledge of the word exclusive. If it was Sir Alf's ambition to procure for his nephew the palm of gentility, he succeeded beyond his wildest dreams on the day when Jim received admission to this order of the monks of St. James's.

But what Jim had never known, though he had recently given more thought to the question than he was accustomed to expend on any one subject, was whether this had in fact been the millionaire's ambition with regard to him, for his ignorance of his uncle's character and nature would have shocked such a believer in family life (that is to say of certain families) as Parish for instance. During all the years that he was being educated, clothed, fed, and given pocket-money by his uncle he had only set eyes on him at infrequent and distant intervals. His guardian had had a knack of turning up unexpectedly at the house of the tutor with whom he had lived during his school holidays, when he would be sent in to see him. On these occasions Sir Alf was generally found writing at the tutor's desk, and when the boy came shyly into the room he would continue his writing for some time although Jim had a curious feeling that he was being inspected through the old man's eyelashes and eyebrows. Finally his uncle would look up suddenly and say "All right, heh?" and Jim would start and say "Yes, sir," whereupon Sir Alf would resume his writing until such time as the tutor returned to the room and Jim was released. Interviews of a similar

nature had occurred at more infrequent intervals during Jim's time at Oxford with the difference that he had been sent for to his uncle's flat, always to be kept waiting there for about half an hour. He would then be ushered into the study, where the briefest and most uncomfortable conversations would take place. At the end of about five minutes his uncle would suddenly say, "Well, James, let Mr. Croft know if you want anything," whereupon he would press a bell-push on his desk and Mr. Croft (his private secretary) would appear and Jim would be shown out, to see no more of Sir Alf until another seven or eight months had elapsed.

As it happened, Jim's demands on Mr. Croft were few. He had always had a large allowance from his uncle paid into his account, which had periodically increased as he had grown older, and though he had never thought twice about spending this money, he was never really extravagant in proportion to the income which he received. In other words, at any given moment he was probably in debt to the extent of his next quarter's allowance.

During all the years that he had been living on his uncle's money their relations had never become more, or less, familiar. At the beginning of the war, when he had just finished his four years at Oxford, he was sent for by Sir Alf, who achieved practical coherency far enough to be able to say, "I was going to 'ave spoken to you about a profession, James, but we'll 'ave to put that off now." He

until his letter from Puxleys'. Put yourself for a moment in this young man's place and you will see that he had good reasons for giving way to as much impatience and curiosity as the traditions of his acquired standard of breeding made him capable of feeling.

It was with a sense of relief, therefore, that he noted through the glass doors the return of the being in buttons now dependent by one hand and one foot from the side of a taxicab, and with a feeling that the next hour might do much to clear up the uncertainty which had been growing on him that he leant back in the cab as it noisily achieved its top speed and headed for Great Bilberry Street.

II

Canterbury House is not one of those modern steel and concrete "houses" with mail chutes and a general architectural style adapted from the first six or seven floors of an American office building. It belongs to an earlier era, is slightly gothic in tendency, given to darkness and lincrusta in the passages, and visitors are transported to the upper stories by a hydraulic lift which totters slowly upwards on a long steel stalk when the attendant puts his full weight on a rope which passes through it.

Puxley, Sons and Bimberton are a very well-known and much respected firm of City solicitors, and their offices on the third floor of Canterbury

House achieve a degree of dirt and discomfort which few other solicitors can boast. One enters through a door marked "Enquiries" into an outer office where a kind of general exhibit of the less exalted part of a solicitor's business is always in progress. A little boy is punching a typewriter, an elder one is making a horrible mess with a copying press, and a third is reading aloud from a vellum document in a high and rapid tone of voice to a bald man on a high stool, whose lips are moving as in prayer while he follows the words in a second copy. The room is papered with a design illustrating the grain of an unknown wood and there are the usual property tin-boxes and cardboard files distributed on shelves, tables and the floor. On everything except the top of the bald's man head the dust of ages has settled thickly, but the head shines and twinkles in the light of an incandescent gas which burns all day, owing to the architect of Canterbury House having apparently forgotten that windows on the north side of his fine erection would have a clearance of less than three feet from the side of the Bucklemongers' Hall.

Jim's taxi had borne him towards this legal black-hole with expedition and accuracy, and he had been much interested in identifying various sights on the route, such as the Bank, which he had immediately recognised as Newgate Gaol. He had time enough, however, in the hydraulic lift between the ground and third floors to give considerable further thought to the problem of what Messrs. Puxleys'

might have to say to him, without arriving at any very definite conclusion. He found his way to the door marked "Enquiries" and entered the outer office. The boy who had been reading as usual from the vellum document immediately ceased his recitation, and Jim was able to tell him that he had come by appointment. The boy seized from him his principals' letter which Jim had again produced from his pocket, and vanished into an inner chamber Jim had hardly had time to recover from the shock of the loss of this letter, without which he felt his self-confidence strangely decreasing, when the boy reappeared as if by magic through another door and passing quickly across the room to yet a fourth one opened it and said, "Will you go in to Mr. Cash, please sir."

Jim had so made up his mind that he was going to see either Mr. Puxley or one of the Master Puxleys or Mr. Bimberton (not knowing that all of them had been dead for years) that he opened his mouth to protest at having Mr. Cash thrown at him like this; but before he could say anything the boy had added, "This way, please sir," so sharply that he found himself through the door and shaking hands with Mr. Cash before he had had time to close his mouth again.

Mr. Cash settled his caller into a chair facing a window giving on to a blinding view of white tiles, and seated himself between caller and window so that it was quite impossible for a client with the

strongest nerves or the most powerful eyesight to notice anything about him except the remarkable extent to which his ears projected.

About five minutes later Jim suddenly realised that Mr. Cash had been talking hard for some time. This was brought to his attention by his hearing himself say " Quite," in response to a sentence of Mr. Cash's which had ended, " you understand this clearly, don't you ? " He felt he must really pull himself together, and was managing as he thought fairly well, although he couldn't quite follow that bit about the transfer of the power of attorney, when another " Quite " from his own mouth brought to his notice the fact that he had really been spending the last few minutes in studying an extremely unpleasant-looking bruise on Mr. Cash's thumb-nail with an attention which would have been better given to its owner's words. He gave another start, and Mr. Cash proceeded, " made the recent position quite clear to you, as I hope, I must warn you that the situation is not as favourable to you as it might at first sight appear. By the will of our late client, which I have here, you are named as sole legatee, which, if I may say so, is a fact upon which I might have offered you my most sincere congratulations but for certain circumstances." " Hullo ! " thought Jim, " this is getting interesting," and he dragged his chair forward a fraction of an inch, while the part of his brain which had all along refused to listen to Mr. Cash began weaving romantic provisos into the

will, such as that he was only to have the money if he married a duke's daughter, or if he grew a beard, or if he went into the Church, or if he bowled a hoop from Land's End to John o' Groat's. Meanwhile Mr. Cash's explanation of the "certain circumstances" seemed to be taking a very long time. Jim heard such phrases as "lapse of royalties," "transfer of concession" and "possibly unjustified confidence," and then the name of Sir Adolf Lloyd began to make its appearance with increasing frequency in Mr. Cash's monologue.

"One moment," said Jim; "excuse my breaking in, but Sir Adolf Lloyd, he was my uncle's partner, wasn't he?"

Mr. Cash's reply to this apparently simple question was of such a lengthy, tortuous and unilluminating nature that it would have done the heart of any other solicitor good to hear it. As far as Jim could gather anything from it, Sir Adolf and his uncle had had a kind of working arrangement at one time, or one might say a series of working arrangements, which did not, however, actually constitute a partnership; a deed of partnership had also on one or possibly more occasions been drawn up, but the only evidence that Messrs. Puxleys' had which made it seem possible that any of these drafts had ever been completed had been a request from their late client almost immediately before his last illness that a clerk should be sent to take instructions in connection with some legal procedure in which Sir

Adolf Lloyd was also concerned. Their late client's request had been made on the telephone, and had not been perfectly clear; this was so unusual that Mr. Cash had in a sense not been surprised to hear on the following day that Sir Alfred had been taken ill. The clerk had accordingly not been sent. From all this Jim felt justified in suggesting, "At any rate they worked together to a great extent at one time?"

"I think I may go as far as that," said Mr. Cash. "You will understand, Mr. Grant," he went on, "that in a business of the nature of Sir Alfred's the actual amount of money which forms what we may now call the estate varies enormously at different periods, which would make it extremely difficult even for Sir Alfred himself to have estimated what it amounted to at any given moment. In addition to this, I think I may say in confidence that a great number of transactions, speculations I might almost call them, appear to have been carried out towards the end by other parties in which your uncle's credit was committed, very deeply committed." Here Mr. Cash, probably feeling that he had dallied long enough with comparatively plain English, sailed off into such a sea of financial technicalities that the inattentive portion of his hearer's brain came into action again, and Jim found himself wondering whether this was all going to lead up to his income being reduced and his having to give up his man.

The thought of this for some reason caused him

rate he was now able to say, "In other words, then you mean that although my uncle made me his heir there was at the time of his death nothing to leave ?"

Mr. Cash wouldn't go so far as to say "Nothing," but his firm had gone very carefully into the matter and they had certainly not been able so far to discover anything. There had been very large payments made by Sir Alfred shortly before his death, while a great number of valuable securities had been realised without its being possible to trace what had happened to the money thus obtained. As a solicitor, with a considerable experience of business methods, he was free to confess that there were several points in connection with this rapid disintegration of a very large fortune which he would have liked to see cleared up, but although he had discussed the matter with counsel he was forced to admit that there was no actual irregularity on which he could put his hand, and in the circumstances, after giving very considerable thought to the matter, his firm had decided that they could not advise Mr. Grant that there was any prospect of his recovering even a small portion of the estate. During this part of the solicitor's recital the name of Sir Adolf Lloyd seemed again to be forming a kind of subdued accompaniment, though it was always introduced with such tact and in the midst of such technicalities that a far more attentive listener might have found it hard to say quite what the intended connection was between this name and Sir Alf Pooley's

will. Mr. Cash was proceeding to elaborate this theme in his usual manner, when Jim broke in once again.

"You will excuse my asking, Mr. Cash," he said, "but does it look, then, as if this Sir Adolf Lloyd hadn't been playing straight?"

Mr. Cash's voice, expression, manner and attitude all expressed horror at such a suggestion being made in connection with anyone, but he was unable to conceal the fact that this was very much how things did look.

"You say it's all gone?" added Jim.

"As far as it is possible to ascertain."

"That is rather unusual, isn't it? I mean that such a lot of money should change hands so quickly."

Mr. Cash agreed that there were elements of the unusual in the case, and a slight pause ensued, at the end of which Jim suddenly rose.

"Look here!" he said. "As you probably can imagine, this news has come as rather a shock to me. There are a great many questions that I should like to ask and points that I want to go into. But I must have a little time to think things over. I'm extremely obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in looking into this affair and in explaining it to me, and I should like to bother you again about it a little later on; but I must have an hour or two to get accustomed to the news. Look here, I'll tell you what, can you dine with me to-night—don't dress—Port Club, any time that suits you?"

Mr. Cash was, as has been said, only human. He naturally wished to overawe all callers at his office with the importance of his firm and of the cares that lay on his shoulders, and in any ordinary circumstances would have replied that he was very sorry but that he was dining with the Treasury Solicitor that evening. But the Port Club! The Law had not fallen into such decay that Mr. Cash could not appreciate the opportunity of renewing his acquaintance with one of the most wonderful cellars in London. The young man seemed a decent young fellow, no airs or anything; he would accept. He did accept. Half-past eight? Half-past eight would do splendidly. They shook hands, Mr Cash pulled a string which rang a station bell in the outer room and one of the boys appeared at the door and ushered Jim out. He also added to his ministrations by yelling after him when he was outside the door that the lift was in the other direction.

Jim felt that he must walk. This was certainly a blow. Damn old Lloyd! Cash was decent enough though. Pity he'd never learnt anything about money. If only he understood it, he pictured himself showing Cash the flaws which had escaped his and counsel's attention, or alternatively entering the City himself, making immediately an enormous fortune and in some unknown way using this to ruin old Lloyd. It really was a bit thick.

Funny people all round him, all walking in the same direction. He supposed they must be clerks

going home. How awful to be a clerk; though anyway they all had incomes, while he—well, let's think. He must really get some details from old Cash this evening, only the trouble was that the more old Cash explained things the more difficult they were to understand. Meanwhile he had a lot of things he could sell; only then, of course, he owed a pretty good bit of money. Good thing he hadn't bought that second-hand Sunbeam; of course, he'd got his name down with the Rolls people for a new car, but they wouldn't expect him to take it if he couldn't pay for it. Hang it all! it was impossible that this should have happened to him—to be a millionaire's heir and have nothing to live on. He laughed at the thought, and some ragged children on the pavement shrieked back at him and fled away, signifying in pantomime as they withdrew that they had grave doubts as to his sanity.

This interruption pulled him together, and he discovered to his surprise that he was back again in a part of London that he recognised. A taxi stopped just in front of him to set down its fare, and he nipped in ahead of a woman with white uppers to her boots who was hurrying towards it and secured it for himself, telling the driver to go to his rooms. Was this lack of chivalry in one whom you may have felt justified up till now in regarding as the hero of this story? Judged by the standards of the Round Table it is possible that it was; but to snatch taxis away from rivals of either sex is an instinct

too strongly embedded in modern civilised humanity for me to attempt to strain your credulity by telling you that Jim Grant on this occasion stood politely back. Besides the woman had white uppers to her boots and would consequently probably have been catalogued in Arthurian society as a sorceress for whom chivalry was never meant. Take a good look at her all the same; she will reappear.

However all this may be, it is certain that the taxi had barely started before it occurred to Jim that a ruined man, as he now was, ought not to ride in a hackney vehicle at eightpence a mile plus super-tax authorised by the Secretary of State plus unknown ransom expected and demanded by the driver. Well, it couldn't be helped now; he was in the taxi, and he was going to stay in the taxi, and he was going to smoke a cigarette in the taxi, and he was going to put his feet up on one of those little spring seats in the taxi—no, he couldn't do that, the spring was too strong; anyway be damned to everything, he didn't care; and he glared rudely at a fellow-citizen whom his cab had just missed by a fraction of an inch.

In this defiant mood Jim arrived at his rooms, gave the driver a half-crown tip and strode upstairs.

III

In the little lobby of his rooms he met Lush, his man. Lush had been employed in the lodgings in

which Jim had stayed whenever he had been in London during his time at Oxford, that is to say after it had been arranged by the ruler of his destiny that he should no longer live with his tutor. In those days Lush had valeted and waited on the three or four occupants of the house in question. He had been a younger and a less dignified Lush then, but he had had the gift of making each and every inhabitant of those particular lodgings in Duke Street think that he was getting more service and attention out of Lush than was his proper share. This was a valuable and remunerative gift, and numerous attempts were made by various lodgers who were leaving those rooms and setting up for themselves in the more distinguished seclusion of a flat or the Albany to seduce Lush from his allegiance to Mr. and Mrs. Turvis, the proprietors of Lush and the lodgings, but always without success. Jim himself had tried and failed in 1914 when he had left Oxford and had meant to set up an establishment of his own in London. Lush had appeared to waver, but while he was still wavering the war had got itself declared and Jim and Lush had both dropped the negotiations and hastened to join the army, the former in a commissioned and the latter in a non-commissioned capacity. Their paths had not crossed during the years of the war, but after the armistice, while Jim was still in hospital, an older and sterner Lush had suddenly appeared before him with a proposal that he should enter his service in

return for such assistance as Jim could arrange in the matter of demobilisation. The bargain was sealed and Jim had never regretted it. He was an easy master, but Lush was a perfect servant; and as perfect servants are never in evidence except when they are wanted, Jim was a little surprised to find his man on this particular afternoon just inside the outer door of his flat apparently awaiting his return. However, as he was there he might as well make use of him.

"Oh, Lush," he said, "will you telephone to the Port Club and say that I shall be dining there to-night at half-past eight? Table for two."

"Yes, sir," replied Lush, but instead of going towards his own quarters where the main telephone was fixed (there were extensions in the sitting-room and in Jim's bedroom) he remained in the little lobby. In his present mood Jim felt that his man might go on standing there until doomsday if he liked, but he wasn't going to ask him what the matter was. Probably he had broken something, or he wanted an unexpected holiday; in any case people who wanted to say something to other people who had just learned that they were ruined had better say it, whatever it was, without waiting to be asked. Also there was a beastly smell of something in the hall—sort of drawing-room smell; had Lush taken to using scent? These thoughts occupied Jim's mind while he pushed his way into the bath-room—in order, if the truth must be told, to look

in the glass over the wash-basin and to see if his hair had gone white or if he had aged twenty years or bore any other outward signs of sudden and recent ruin. In fact he found that he bore no such signs, but that his hair needed brushing. He brushed it and emerged from the bath-room. Hang it all! Lush was still there.

"What is it, Lush?" he said rather sharply. "Anything the matter?"

"Excuse me, sir," began Lush. This was a bad beginning, arguing unwelcome news of some sort, and the frown which we saw on Jim's forehead in the hall of the Port Club after lunch on this eventful day reappeared at the tone of the man's voice.

"Well, what is it?"

"Excuse me, sir, but a young lady called here this afternoon when you were out."

This was a sufficiently unusual occurrence in Jim's innocent young life to cause the frown to disappear from the forehead and a look of interest to take its place in the pleasant countenance. He conveyed a note of interrogation to his man, signifying "Proceed."

"About three-quarters of an hour ago, sir. She wouldn't give any name. Very well dressed, sir. Said she knew you weren't expecting her. Wanted to come in and wait for you, sir. I'd never seen her before, sir, of course, and I didn't quite know what you'd wish."

"Young; well-dressed," murmured Jim; then

louder, "Well, I hope you were gentle in your method of turning her from my door, Lush. I certainly wasn't expecting any young lady."

"That's just it, sir," replied Lush. "You'll excuse me, sir, but she wouldn't leave."

"Well, did you send for the police?" asked Jim. He was enjoying the unusual sight of embarrassment on Lush's face, where so far as he knew it had never before appeared. And yet the suggestion of the police was hardly enough to account for Lush's increasing air of discomfort.

"No, sir," he answered, "I'm afraid that didn't occur to me."

"Then how did you get rid of her?"

"I didn't, sir," replied Lush.

"You didn't?"

"No, sir. She's in your sitting-room now, sir."

"What?" Jim spun round and looked at his sitting-room door as if it could explain everything.

"Yes, sir," continued Lush. "And she made me bring her tea, sir."

The expression on Lush's face as he made this announcement was so pathetic that Jim, whose temper had been improving every second, burst into a loud laugh.

His unknown visitor must have heard this. A feminine voice—I will say more, a delightful feminine voice called out from the sitting-room, "Is that you, Jim? Why don't you come in?"

Jim turned towards Lush, but Lush was no longer there.

As he turned back again to enter his sitting-room the thought occurred to him that he was glad that he had just brushed his hair.

IV

Jim's sitting-room—also breakfast-room, dining-room, study and card-room—was, if I may say so, an uncommonly comfortable apartment. The discovery of the little flat itself he owed to Lush, who at a time when London was bursting with an indigestible surfeit of population had through mysterious means of his own managed to get advance information of the previous occupant's approaching departure, so that the premises had been transferred to Jim not only before the news of their vacancy had reached any agents, but even before the commissionaire who sat in the entrance-hall downstairs had heard of it. Lush had warned his employer that his success had done the commissionaire out of the commission (is this the origin of the title?) which he was expecting to wring from some other flat-hunter in return for early advice of a vacancy in No. 27, but in his joy at finding a home Jim was quite prepared to make this up to Sergeant Pink, and they became and remained on the best of terms. And it must be confessed that it was an extremely convenient, comfortable and expensive little flat.

want me to see you again and would I please see that you weren't asked to the house any more."

"This sort of thing is getting a habit in your family, Mary," said Jim. "It's exactly what you said to me yourself last Friday, and I've been trying to live up to it ever since—and that reminds me, I thought you said you were never going to speak to me again."

"My dear Jim, it's one thing for me to tell you to get out and keep away because you won't stop——"

"Proposing?" suggested Jim.

"Yes; doing that to me. But it's quite another thing when Father tells me to drop my old friends—quite another thing. I'm not going to have that. Of course, I came straight round here to try and find you at once, or at any rate as soon as I had seen the dressmaker. I want to get to the bottom of this."

Fire flashed from the lovely creature's eyes and a look of unconquerable determination showed itself in every feature.

"Well, Mary," began Jim, "it seems your father has done me a good turn this time——" A warning look in Mary's eye warned him off the sentimental pathway towards which he was straying, and he continued, "But you said he was so keen on me, and was always saying why didn't you have more nice young men like me to the house. I can't make it out, I——" His jaw dropped suddenly as the thought flashed into his mind that old Mr. Steele must have heard some rumour about his uncle's

losses. Good Lord! were people as mercenary as—no, perhaps he was right. It was damned offensive, but he supposed it was right. Jim had felt anger and disappointment on his journey back from the City, but his first feeling of hot self-pity came when he realised that as a pauper he would have to stop proposing to Mary Steele.

"Well, Jim, go on! I want to know what it is you've done. How have you disgraced us all?"

Jim's thoughts were racing. He couldn't deal with the problems and questions that were pouring into his mind from every direction. He must temporize for a minute; so he gave a laugh (which was a failure) and then said: "But didn't your father say any more? Didn't he give any reason?"

"Of course not," said Mary, "Father never gives reasons. He's made his fortune by having a big chin and never giving reasons. I asked him over and over again. I said, 'What's Jim done?' He said he couldn't say, but that he had reasons for wishing an undesirable acquaintanceship to be brought to an end. Oh, Jim! don't you see that nothing could make me stop seeing you if I wanted to? We've had such tremendous fun and things that, of course, I couldn't stop just because I was suddenly told to by some one else. And besides I should miss all your——"

"Proposals," suggested Jim hopefully, forgetting everything.

"Nonsense. 'Racing tips' was what I was going

to say. But Jim, seriously and really, what does it mean? Have you got into any trouble? Have I been and driven you to the dogs?" (A little hopefully, but the shade of expression was lost on the coarser male.)

The conversation had now reached a point which Jim had been dreading. What and how much ought he to say? If we could tabulate the headings of the problem with which he was faced we should find them something as follows:—

1. I don't really know that everything's quite hopeless, and don't want to make things out blacker than they are, at any rate until I've seen those solicitors again, BUT I'm bound to say that fellow didn't hold out much hope this afternoon.

2. If I say straight out that I've lost all my money, it will look as if I was accusing old Steele of wanting to drop me for that very reason. BUT even if this is true, I know I couldn't do a sillier thing than appear to attack Mary's father, because she never lets anyone do that except herself.

3. And even supposing I do get over that snag and take the risk of telling her that I think I'm broke, ten to one there'll be an emotional scene, leading to one of two possibilities, that is to say either:—

(*a*) I propose to her again, which in the circumstances and in my rooms would be a cad's trick, or

(*b*) I do a renunciation stunt, which would be a silly ass trick, and besides I couldn't do it.

Ergo what the dickens and everything else *am* I to say? And to add to my troubles there is Mary sitting in my chair looking too adorable for words, but fixing me with a penetrating gaze beneath which any kind of deceit or hypocrisy must inevitably break down.

"Well, Jim, come on, what is it?" asked Mary.

Jim was now pacing the room not unlike a caged lion, and realising more every second that his chances of being believed if he said he had no idea what was up were growing less and less.

"Jim!"

"Look here, Mary," he said, stopping suddenly in his walk, "I think it's most extraordinarily good of you to have come here like this—I think it's wonderful, I do really, although you must swear not ~~to do it~~ again. I can't imagine why your father has suddenly taken this line. I've committed no crime, and so far as I know there is no scandal in circulation about me up to the moment, though of course I can't promise about the future if you take to calling here. I see you don't quite believe me, but it's an absolute fact. If I seem at all odd this evening you must put it down partly to my surprise at seeing you here and partly to my having come straight from the dickens of an interview with my uncle's solicitors. That's really all."

He took a step forward and tried to look straight

at Mary's eyes, but of course he couldn't; not because he was deceiving her in any way, but because one simply couldn't look straight at Mary's eyes without losing one's head.

"Well," said Mary, "I suppose that was all I really wanted to know; that is to say without the bits about how I oughtn't to be here. Only I think you might tell me what the solicitors said. Are you going to be enormously rich, or has it all gone to the cats' home? Come on, do tell me!"

Now he was lost. He knew it, and nothing could save him. The adored one's curiosity is a force that only a madman would try to stem, a craving that only a fool would dare to deny; and Jim was just opening his mouth to yield to it, when at this very moment the latch clicked, the door opened, and Lush appeared.

There is a scientific explanation for most things, and in this case it may be found in the fact that in taking his last step forward towards Mary, Jim had planted one foot firmly on an electric bell-push over which there generally stood a card-table. The device is not unknown in certain circles in connection with the service of meals, and had been introduced by Jim to facilitate the provision of further supplies of drinks, cigars, coals or cards on the occasions when he and his friends were occupying the night hours in games of skill and chance. The electric current, in short, communicated with a bell in Lush's retreat. But mark the workings of Fate;

for even this bell could not have saved Jim if Mary had not insisted on showing Lush that she wasn't afraid of him during her wait by ordering tea.

Afternoon tea in this particular flat was an unknown meal, represented on the rare occasions when anyone was present at that time of the day by whisky and soda, and Lush had, in order to comply with Miss Steele's demand, moved the card-table across to the side of her chair preparatory to placing upon it Jim's early morning tea-service. Thus it is that science explains Lush's most opportune arrival at this instant. Jim and Mary, at the moment could only regard it as miraculous, and both turned to look at him with equal surprise.

Lush, however, so far from showing any embarrassment at the gaping visages turned towards him, was heard to enquire politely whether his employer wanted a taxi fetching.

Jim was about to decline abruptly on his visitor's behalf, when she, glancing at her wrist-watch, started up and cried, "Oh yes, please, at once—I'd no idea it was so late. I must go at once."

Strange perversity in human nature! No sooner had Jim heard these words than he, who a moment before had wished the object of his affections almost anywhere but where she was, would now have given anything to keep her for five more minutes. But Mary was drawing on her gloves and Lush had departed to request Sergeant Pink over the house telephone to get a taxi, and even in the year in

"Not allowed. Good-bye," and she was gone.

The constriction went from the throat to reappear in an aggravated form at the back of the eyes.

A thought struck Jim.

"Lush!" he shouted.

Lush reappeared.

"Why the dickens did you come in just now? I never rang."

The scientific mind of Lush had solved the problem. "I think you must have trodden on that bell-push, sir," he said. "My bell rang for two or three minutes. I thought you required an intervention, sir."

"Oh," said Jim, and again "Oh." As nothing followed, Lush withdrew.

It was all there was to say. Mary wouldn't come and see him again. No point in telling Lush not to do it another time, or in having the bell disconnected. Not much point in anything really. He felt suddenly very flat and desolate. Too much excitement to-day. What about a drink now? No, ten thousand times no, not while the room still had that faint fragrance of Mary in it, that indescribable something which—he sniffed again. It was going Damn!

By Jove it was late! He'd better think of changing unless he wanted to be late for that beastly dinner with that beastly man.

So he slammed his way through to his bedroom, and dressed in gloom and misery, and split one of the

stud-holes in the front of his shirt and pinched his neck in doing up his collar, and when it was all done he remembered that he had told Mr. Cash not to dress. Damn! again. He selected a shabbier hat and coat than the ones put out for him by Lush, as being more in accord with his mood, and walked gloomily out towards his club.

V

While the saddened Jim is passing through the few streets which separate his rooms from the Port Club, let the explanatory and parenthetical Muse descend and address the reader, who is, or should be, feeling some curiosity on the subject of Jim's recent visitor. Who is Mary Steele; what is her father; what about the rest of her family; how long had Jim known them, and how had he got to know them? I think the Muse can just manage to answer these questions if she is prompt and business-like, as, fortunately for her, Jim's depression is causing him to walk extremely slowly, while he makes very inaccurate passes at lamp-posts with his gold-headed cane and stops once or twice to gaze in an unseeing way into some of the few shop windows which are not eclipsed by blinds or shutters. So, as I say, if the Muse can only keep her head and confine herself to hard facts, we shall still be in time to greet Jim on his arrival at the Club, where by the way Mr. Cash has just arrived and is waiting in that state of

nervousness and discomfort which the bravest of us feel when we arrive earlier than our host at a strange club.

Let the Muse speak then briefly and to the point.

Jim's first meeting, says she, with Mary Steele had taken place in 1916 and in circumstances on which neither of them cared to lay too much stress. The occasion was, in fact, an afternoon dance given for overseas officers by Lady Plater at her house in Portman Square.

Jim's presence there may be succinctly accounted for by the fact that he had received an invitation to a meeting called to discuss a proposed memorial to the late master of his college, for which Lord Twickenham had kindly lent his drawing-room. He was in a state of existence at the moment in which he was required to be back at his hospital, inconveniently situated near the Crystal Palace, by half-past five, which caused him to accept the most desolating invitations on the afternoons when there were no *matinées* sooner than lose his grip on civilisation altogether by going for walks in Sydenham. Accordingly, having lost Lord Twickenham's invitation card, he arrived in Portman Square on the wrong afternoon, and seeing a number of taxis drive up to No. 44A he directed his driver to the same house, and was ushered upstairs to a large room where a very little dancing and a great deal of staring and shuffling were going on to the sound of a gramophone. Of course he realised at once that this was

the wrong house, but before he could turn to depart he had seen Mary and fallen in love with her.

Mary's presence at this function may in turn be accounted for by her youth and inexperience, which had made her an easy prey for Lady Plater. This beneficent lady organised her entertainments by causing general invitations to be pinned up on the notice-boards of the various clubs for overseas officers, on the committees of which she as the wife of an ex-Governor sat, following this up by making various dowagers of her acquaintance send their more defenceless female offspring. Having done this much she left her secretary-companion to work the gramophone, and went to bed with a sick-headache. Mary's mother had been dead for many years, but her father was a director of several companies of which the ex-Governor was chairman, and as he was in the habit of occasionally dining at the house in Portman Square, and had on the last occasion unguardedly let out that he had a daughter with her hair up, Mary's fate was sealed.

To tell the candid truth she was not enjoying her afternoon. The secretary-companion had introduced various guests to her without mentioning their names and she had not got on very well with them. Either they were so shy that they left her as soon as the introduction had been made, or they immediately paid her embarrassingly direct compliments, or they made remarks while dancing in dialects which she was unable to understand, whereupon they

looked at her as though she were an imbecile. Nothing, thought Mary, would induce her to come to one of Lady Plater's afternoon dances again.

In these circumstances did Jim Grant and Mary Steele first set eyes on one another. At the moment when Jim's heart had just picked up its beat again, the gramophone stopped, and by a miracle the secretary-companion hastening round the room picked him out and bringing him across the room introduced him to Mary. In such surroundings it is perhaps not surprising that they found each other interesting. They spent the rest of the afternoon in the dining-room together, eating biscuits and drinking barley-water (Lady Plater knew that young people didn't really care about anything but the dancing, and so did not over-elaborate the refreshments which were offered). Jim reintroduced and explained himself, they discovered mutual acquaintances and eventually he got back to his Sydenham address at seven o'clock, and was dealt with accordingly.

Mary must have mentioned the meeting to her father; at any rate, Jim was not driven to the dreadful expedient of attending (uninvited) another of Lady Plater's dances in the hopes of finding her there, as shortly after the one which has been described he was invited to dinner at Metcalfe Steele's house, and, military and medical engagements permitting, he had much pleasure in accepting.

The dinner at Steele's large and ugly house, on

the north side of the park, was good but dull, and Jim had little opportunity of speaking to Mary; but from this time onwards they became more and more intimate. Whenever Jim was in London they used to meet, and Mary's father on the infrequent occasions when he was visible had shown every appearance of approving the intimacy. He was a widower, occupied mysteriously and apparently with success in the City, and had no other children, so that as far as it is ever possible to say without examining one's future father-in-law's pass-book, Mary was something of a catch. But this side of things probably never occurred to either Jim or Mary, neither of whom had the war yet caused to consider even the possibility of not having all the money they wanted. Their young romance was accordingly typically one of the golden age, into which no consideration but their own feelings entered, and was but another example of the moral and ethical purity of the rare atmospheric altitudes of riches.

Jim had first proposed early in 1917, and had continued to do so up to the date of this story. He had proposed in the morning, the afternoon, the evening, in London, on the river, at the races, on the telephone, by post, in health, in sickness, and once even in what he thought was verse. And on all and each of these occasions Mary had said No, and Jim had said was there anyone else, and Mary had said No there wasn't anyone else, and Jim had said

didn't she care about him then, and Mary had said, "Yes, awfully, but——." This "but——" was the curse of Jim's existence. The riddle of the sphinx and the problem of squaring the circle left him cold. He took little or no interest in such vital, but hitherto unanswered questions as what eventually becomes of old safety-razor blades, or why women smile when they sit down in omnibuses, or how it is that pats of butter are round in London and square in New York. All these enigmas he was content to leave unsolved, if only he could find out what Mary meant when she said, "but——"

Any attempts to probe the mystery by direct cross-examination always led to threats from Mary of dismissal and exile for the questioner and had consequently to be dropped. And so things had gone on. Mary becoming lovelier and more adorable every month, Jim getting further and deeper in love with her and, up till this sudden change, old Metcalfe Steel apparently beaming on their friendship.

VI

Thus spake the Muse Parenthesis. True to her nature she had taken more time and space than was intended, so that we have unfortunately missed Jim's arrival at the Port Club, his meeting with Mr. Cash and even the earlier courses of their dinner.

In missing these, however, we have lost nothing which really bears on the story, as both host and

guest were little inclined to talk until a bottle of the celebrated Club Port had been duly opened by Charles, the wine waiter, and carefully and respectfully placed before them.

Mr. Cash when seen in a direct light, which was, as has been said, impossible at his office, proved to be a pleasantly ugly-looking man of about fifty, with rimless eyeglasses from which an extraordinarily curly black cord passed over one of the prominent ears and reappeared, still curling furiously, on the front of his white shirt. For as usually happens when two men are dining together for the first time and arrange not to dress, Mr. Cash as well as Jim had put on a dinner-jacket and a black tie.

Port Club cooking is always plain but always good, and in accordance with the genuine Club tradition, always followed when the old Port has been ordered, the two men only toyed with a bottle of claret until the arrival, rather earlier than is the general custom, of the real hero of the dinner, who was carried in in an appalling state of cobweb and dirt which Charles did not remove until the bottle had been ceremoniously presented to and bowed at by both diners. Only after this rite had been duly observed was some of the outer covering of filth gingerly wiped away and their two glasses filled with the precious fluid.

The dinner continued on its even course of plain excellence, and by the time that the savoury had disappeared it was found necessary to ask for a

second bottle, most of which seemed to find its way into Mr. Cash's glass. Jim himself had not done so badly with the first bottle, and though by a kind of tacit understanding all discussion on the subject of his affairs was postponed until they should have withdrawn to the smoking-room, yet by the time dinner was three-quarters of the way through, conversation had become so easy that on more than one occasion he and his guest found themselves speaking at the same time. Mr. Cash's discourse, beginning mostly on the subject of the vintages he had met, drifted imperceptibly into a monologue on the lesser-known and more disgusting habits of various animals, of which he appeared to have a profound knowledge. Jim, on the other hand, starting from much the same point as Mr. Cash, might later have been heard describing some of the grosser mistakes perpetrated by our general staff during the war, with a wealth of technical detail and a flow of sound criticism which he found himself admiring so much that he frequently repeated the choicer portions three or four times. At about ten o'clock Mr. Cash, in illustrating a mannerism of the female mandrill, knocked over a bottle of brandy which had somehow appeared on the table, and indescribably humorous as this seemed to both host and guest, it yet somehow suggested that it might be a fitting moment to adjourn to the smoking-room. There was a little difficulty over the matter of precedence through the narrow doorway of the dining

room, and rather more difficulty before Jim could succeed in unfastening the locker in the smoking-room in which he kept some rather special cigars of his own, but eventually they found a couple of secluded seats in the now practically empty room and, after lighting up, turned to business. The Mr. Cash who now suddenly produced a bundle of papers from his pocket was an extraordinarily different being from the sinister silhouette whom Jim had met for the first time earlier in the day. Mellow good-humour now beamed from every feature, and in the course of his remarks he frequently addressed Jim as "my dear boy"; while more than once he tapped him on the arm with his hand or the lighted end of his cigar.

Oh do not let it be imagined by anyone who has read so far that either of these gentlemen was the worse for liquor—no one who knows and has sampled that magic Port could ever dream of its conceivably making anyone anything but the better for consuming it. The noble fluid had, indeed, warmed both their hearts more than a little; it had undeniably filled both of them with a joy in living which for one at least of them had at the moment little other justification; it is just possible that physical and moral outlines had for both become pleasantly, though but temporarily, blurred—but that is not being drunk. The real and only genuine test for drunkenness is the state of the supposed sufferer on the morning following the alleged fall

" I hadn't meant to say anything unprocessionable " (he probably meant " unprofessional," but neither of them noticed the slight slip) " but I've seen a thing or two. There's been some very dirty work going on over this business, and if you want to know who's been at the bottom of it all, I tell you it's——" (here he moved his lips to form a name, but no sound came).

" Who ? " asked Jim.

Again Mr. Cash's lips moved in exaggerated pantomime and again no sound emerged.

" Well, but who ? " asked Jim again.

" Doesn't do to mention names," replied Mr. Cash, at last making himself audible, " but in the sanctity of this chamber I will tell you. The man's name is Lloyd. Adolf Lloyd. Formerly known as Adolf Loewe. Origin Swiss." Here this unusual solicitor attempted and almost achieved a wink. " Naturalised in 1910. That's how the Adolf got left in, I suppose. Knighted in 1912. My God ! " he added feelingly.

" Well, but how d'you——? " began Jim.

" Listen to me, my dear boy," interrupted Mr. Cash, replacing his eyeglasses on his nose and at the same time dropping a great quantity of cigar-ash on to his waistcoat. " I can't prove it. We—the firm—we've tried all we could to find something ; but everything's straight on the top. Your uncle and this feller did a lot of business together before the war — hand-in-glove — thick as th-ick. Well,

that was your uncle's look out, and anyway it all stopped when the war came. City gossip, I dare say, but it's true. They had a row—bust-up—separated. Not bad at first, you know, but as the war went on things got like hell between those two. And I'll tell you something. They were both pretty tough customers in a fight. Your uncle was a very remarkable man; obstinate as they make 'em, but by Jove! old Lloyd, he's a vindictive old bird. I wouldn't like to get in his path. Lot of people said he ought to be shut up, you know—sympathies with Switzerland. But by gosh! that man's in everything—you can't touch him. And he's stronger and richer, and I'll swear more of a blackguard to-day than ever he was. Well, my boy, this is between you and me. My firm, we've done business for your uncle for forty years—we wouldn't let you down now just because the money's gone, if there were anything to be done. But there isn't. You can't touch him."

"But do you mean to say," asked Jim, "that all my uncle's money, and I suppose at one time it was the dickens of a lot, has gone into this man's pocket?"

"Not a bit of it," said Mr. Cash. "Why I expect it cost old Lloyd more to ruin Sir Alf than most rich men earn in a lifetime. It's not like a game of cards when there's a fight like that on, where what one fellow loses the other one wins. It's more like—well, roulette in a way. You see these two had been

in with each other for years. Old Lloyd knew your uncle's system of play; what numbers he'd put his money on, if you see what I mean. And by Jove! he'd see those numbers didn't turn up if he had to buy the whole Casino to do it. I'm only putting two and two together, mind you, but I'm pretty certain I'm right. You see your uncle's handicap was that he was an obstinate man playing against a vindictive one. All he wanted to do at first was to keep clear of Lloyd and never see him or have anything to do with him again; he never believed until the very end, I don't suppose, that old Lloyd was laying for him. But I think he must have seen it at the last."

"Well, but the money must be somewhere," persisted Jim. "Who *has* got it?"

"It isn't necessary that it should be anywhere really," answered Mr. Cash. "Men of this kind aren't playing about with treasury notes, you know, but with options and concessions and the year after next's outputs and crops. But what cash there was has gone to various middlemen; brokers, agents, and so on; though even these I should think had lost more than they made, with old Lloyd knocking down everything in sight in the hopes that your uncle might be somewhere underneath. I hadn't meant to tell you all this—it's no part of my business to feed you up with my guesses—but it's true for all that. Old Lloyd was in a pretty hole once or twice towards the end of the war, but his credit's better

now than it has ever been. This sort of a fight can't go on without people talking about it, and now your poor uncle's down and out everyone wants to be the first to shake hands with Lloyd.

" Now I'll give you one piece of advice, my boy. What I've told you, I've told you in confidence and I know I needn't ask you not to repeat it, but my advice is this. Do what you can to collect any of your uncle's assets which may be lying about, and we—Puxleys'—will help you as best we can. But don't, after what I've told you to-night, don't go thinking you can fight Adolf Lloyd. I'd give you the same advice if you'd spent fifty years in the City, and I'd be right. But I'm a million times more right as things are. It's a bit of a blow to you, I expect, but unless you want to end in the workhouse you be content with what you've got and earn what you can without trying to work off any revenge on Lloyd. He'd smash you as easily as that," said Mr. Cash, snapping his fingers with extraordinary brio. " By the way, you haven't told me, what *is* your profession ? "

" The same as most people of my age," said Jim. " Unemployed ex-soldier with no particular prospects."

" That's bad," murmured Mr. Cash, looking suddenly rather displeased. " All the same, my advice stands," he added, " so bear it in mind. And anything we can do to help you at any time we shall be only too glad. Puxleys' have made a pretty

good thing out of your uncle at one time and another, and we're not ungrateful."

"It's very good of you," said Jim. "I won't forget it." Then a thought seemed to strike him. "Look here, tell me one thing," he said. "Does—is it—do you suppose many people know about my uncle's losses? I mean I don't want to tell people anything if they don't know. I don't want a lot of sympathetic asses laughing at me behind my back."

"I suppose it's pretty generally known in the inner ring in the City that Sir Alfred had been rather hard hit," replied Mr. Cash. "I've heard it myself some time ago, but no one knows the details. He worked more and more on his own towards the end, and though my firm of course now know the real position, I don't suppose that more than a very few people can have guessed that the losses were so heavy. I imagine old Lloyd knows," he added grimly, "though not to a farthing by any means. Of course, when the particulars arrive at Somerset House anyone who wants can see what your uncle's estate was worth, and I'm afraid you must be prepared for some of the newspapers getting hold of it as a good story. But that won't be for some little time yet, and meanwhile the position is rather like this: Your friends probably know that you'd an uncle and know his name, but unless I'm very much mistaken they're not the kind of people to follow an affair of this sort very closely. And on the other hand, I don't imagine one person in a

hundred who knew about your uncle's affairs in the City would ever have heard of you. No, my boy, for the time being if you want it kept quiet, I fancy you'll find it pretty easy. That's for you to decide. There's no disgrace attached to the business any way. I can assure you of that."

"I see," said Jim. "Thanks very much."

Perhaps the first fine effects of the wonderful wine were wearing off, causing him to regret his recent unprofessional outburst, or perhaps he feared that this disappointed heir would take advantage of his expansiveness to try and borrow five pounds from him; at any rate, Mr. Cash at this point suddenly turned the conversation violently away from all personal matters and for the rest of the evening they discussed such subjects as sport, cooking, pensions and politics; and not very long afterwards Mr. Cash rose to his feet and bade his host good night with many thanks for a delightful evening.

"You must dine with me here again one night," said Jim.

"Delighted any time," said Mr. Cash. "By Jove! it's late—well, many thanks again. Let us know if there's anything we can do for you. We shall probably be writing to you from time to time about various points. Meanwhile, good night and good luck! I think I'll walk home. It's a fine night and it's not far."

Jim saw his guest into his hat and coat and out of the front door. Mr. Cash walked steadily, but not

you in business and we lost four or five years that way. But that's not all. I've got more than five years older since 1914, and as I've told you I've been having a hard fight now for a long time with a man whom I did a lot to help when he was young, but who's forgotten that and forgotten that he is at any rate in law an Englishman. If I'd had you with me I feel we could have got him under, but of course that couldn't be done. I've been alone, and now it's come to this, that at the point when as I say I'm in it up to the neck and when I know that the next month or so will see one or the other of us out of it, I go and get this attack and am told by the Dr. to lay up and leave the City. You see how it is, I've got to go on whatever happens because I can't go back, and this is where you come in. In my will which Puxleys' have had for years now I've put you down for everything, and at any time during the last forty years I don't mind telling you that would have been a pretty decent amount. Now at the end I'm cracking up and I've staked the whole lot in a fresh fight. It comes to this; if I win and live I may still carry out my plans in spite of " (word crossed out) " the Kaiser. If I win and die you'll come in for what there is. But if I lose and live or lose and die there'll be nothing for you, James. I know I've never said there would be anything for you when I went, but that doesn't leave me quite easy as I feel that you've a right to expect something. So in this letter I'm putting notes for £500. It may be all

you'll get or it may be less than a thousandth part. If I end in an unholy smash-up it'll give you time to turn round anyhow. I'm sorry I can't make it more at the moment.

"I would write more about all this, but I've got to spend my time very carefully at present.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"ALF POOLEY."

Jim read and re-read this letter several times without moving from his chair. Then he carefully placed his uncle's enclosure in his notecase and returned it to his pocket. The letter which he had just read, taken in conjunction with Mr. Cash's recent confidences, had taught him more in one evening about his uncle than he had learnt during all the years that he had been dependent on him. Fresh thoughts came surging up in his mind from every direction—he understood now, he imagined, the meaning of the look in Sir Alf's face the last time he had seen him, when he had tried to speak to him but couldn't. Thanks to Mr. Cash he realised also who the enemy referred to in this letter must be, and as he sat there he felt, quite apart from all question of his own present position, a growing loyalty to his dead uncle and a passionate wish that he could really have been at his side during that last struggle.

He rose and strode up and down the empty smoking-room. That five hundred pounds—what a sportsman his uncle was, putting that on one side

when he was being hard driven by his adversaries. Of course, it could only be used now to stave off some of the larger creditors, but still even to be able to do that was something. By Jove! wouldn't he give something to do old Lloyd in the eye! His own eye at this instant fell on a shelf of reference books which stood in a corner of the room; he crossed to it and extracted "Who's Who." Of course, he vaguely knew the name Lloyd before and had always understood that he and his uncle had been somehow or other in business together, an impression he had gathered by having heard Mr. Croft at the telephone on the occasions when he had visited his uncle's flat, but he knew nothing about him really. Who was the old brute, anyhow? He fumbled his way to the name in "Who's Who." Yes, there he was. "Lloyd, Sir Adolf Sigismund, Kt." No date or place of birth was given. Married and one son. There followed a list of banks and corporations with which he was connected. Recreation: Golf. ("I know that sort of golf," thought Jim.) Clubs: Two or three in the City and some not too distinguished West-end ones. And then came the last but not the least shock that Jim was to experience on this eventful Thursday. For Sir Adolf's paragraph ended as follows: "Addresses, 187 Grosvenor Street and New Court, Odiham, Hants."

Mary was going there to-morrow!

And her father's veto was explained.

VII

The smoking-room was beginning to fill up again with members who, occupying the inconvenient but much sought after bedrooms on the upper floors of the Club, had returned from their evening dissipations, entertainments and avocations, and with others who had made a habit in happier days of looking in for a drink before seeking their own dwellings and for whom this custom had survived absence of alcohol. It was the hour when by age-long licence it was permitted to speak as loudly as one liked and not in the hushed tones which the convention of the smoking-room demanded of members during the rest of the day. "Time to clear out," thought Jim, and he moved towards the door. One or two acquaintances called out to him as he passed, and he received an invitation to play golf on the following day. But although he had no engagement and on any other day would probably have accepted, he declined. At the moment, although a plus one player, the prospect of golf filled him with boredom and contempt. All very well for people with nothing to worry about to think of tramping round Walton Heath; he wished them joy of it, but he'd got something better to do, Well, but had he? What had he got to do except add up his debts, sell his things, and register at a labour exchange? The thought of the possibility of winning half a crown on the match made him

pause for a moment at the door of the smoking-room, but before he could turn back a fresh wave of distaste for human society swept over him and he passed on to where his hat and coat were hanging.

If the Port Club Port has a drawback, it is possibly to be found in the moment of depression which it induces after the first effect has worn off and before its famous after-effect has got going. With some subjects this is literally but a moment; no doubt much depends on the psychology of the votary and the conditions under which he is at the time. Certainly it was never intended by the divinities who originally laid it down that it should be drunk by persons capable of discussing business or considering their own future after a whole bottle. Jim had tampered with the magic and he was having a bad ten minutes.

Still in this mood he left the Club. Parish had retired for the night, and his nocturnal deputy, who affected a kind of fireman's undress uniform, merely received a glare in reply to his "Good night, sir."

And in continued blackness of spirit Jim walked up St. James's Street, his hands in his overcoat pocket and his hat tilted over his eyes. The sound of midnight revelry from some chambers overlooking this historic street, in which could be recognised by an educated ear a tortured version on a hired piano of a transatlantic melody to which he and Mary had been dancing less than a week ago, seemed but to kindle his glowing hatred of mankind. A moment

later he crossed the road so as to avoid saying good night to a policeman to whom he was in the habit of paying this trifling attention on his way home from the Club of an evening.

And yet, oh peerless Port! before he had extracted his latch-key in order to open the street door of his home, the mood had gone. Hope, wild hope was surging through his veins—he ran up the stairs, missing a step at the top and barking his shin. What of it? He had the world at his feet still; he was young, healthy, brilliant (curious how he had never really appreciated his own brilliance before this moment). He loved a goddess and he would win her. He would show them all the kind of fellow he really was. He would find out what that "but——" meant. He would begin at once. No time like the present. Rigid economy. Spartan discipline. A brave face to the world. Then growing success, riches, triumph, marriage, an earldom—at this moment he suddenly realised that he was still on the landing outside his flat. He let himself in. Now, then, what was the first thing to do? Of course—give Lush notice. Mustn't have a man now. But he must do it carefully; he must be tactful, considerate and—yes, but how did one give a man notice? He'd never considered this before. Lush had offered to come to him and named his wages, but nothing had ever been said about arrangements for terminating the engagement. Must be careful or Lush would bring an action for breach of promise or

something and get that five hundred pounds. He ought to have a book telling one what to do. He looked round at his bookcases. Now, that "Encyclopædia Britannica" that he'd got at Oxford—there ought to be an article somewhere there if one only knew where to look that would explain the whole thing. Either under Valets, or Law or Economy or—hullo! there was a volume missing. This was too much.

The only thing that Jim could be quite certain that he had ever learnt from his tutor at Oxford was a respect for that often untaught section of the school of Literæ Humaniores which inculcates the care and preservation of books. Of the literary contents of his not inconsiderable library he had a fair but by no means exhaustive knowledge, finding, as many have found, that a book which while still lying unbought and uncut in the monastic odour of a bookseller's shop cannot be put down, has yet an unaccountable habit of losing its interest when removed to one's own fireside; and having also fallen a victim to the weakness, only to be indulged in by the rich, which does so much to keep the literary world on its legs, of always ordering the whole of an author's output whenever he had derived pleasure from a single example of it. In the physical care of his books, on the other hand, he had few equals. Every case in the flat was glass-fronted; no book was ever left lying on table, chair or floor; all the shelves were filled to the exact pressure

recommended by the Royal Society of Literature, so that bindings were not injured either by undue compression or by the more damaging alternative of deviation from the perpendicular; never did Jim mark his place in a book by turning down the corner, by leaving it open flat on its face or by closing it on anything thicker than a single sheet of paper. Sooner would he lose his place irrecoverably than use a pencil, a cigarette or a handkerchief as book-marker, substitutes to which the ordinary reader has been known to descend. Thus it was that the missing volume of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" presented for him a problem which must be dealt with without a moment's delay. Not for a second could he be in a room with that gap unless the volume were in his own hands or otherwise satisfactorily accounted for.

He rang the bell.

"You rang, sir?" said Lush, appearing in the doorway.

"I rang, my dear Lush," replied Jim, swaying gently backwards and forwards on his toes much as if about to take unexpected flight, "because a gap, a vacuum, a hiatus, a chasm, a lacuna, an aposiopesis has appeared in the serried ranks of my 'Encyclopædia Britannica.' A sheep, my dear Lush, a solitary sheep (slightly to vary the metaphor) is missing from my fold. When the evening dews were falling to-night one ewe volume failed to return. Let search be made," he continued, waving his right

arm with a magnificent gesture, "through all the four corners of my kingdom by high and low until that erring volume is found and returned. For there is more joy in Heaven, Lush," he added, dropping his voice about an octave, "over one volume which was lost and is found than over—than over a lot of other things," he ended rather lamely, and sat down suddenly on the club fender.

His employer's present rather rococo manner was, if the truth must be told, no new experience to Lush, who had known it assumed on several previous occasions, which, if he had held the key to the mystery, he could have identified as some of the evenings on which Jim had been refused by Mary. But as on this particular evening Lush appeared distinctly uneasy during his master's oration, it may be thought that his conscience was not altogether clear in the matter of the missing book. Nor was it.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure," he said, "I'm afraid I took the liberty of borrowing it this evening. I have been reading it while I was waiting for you to come in, sir."

"You have been reading it while you were waiting for me to come in?" repeated Jim in amazement.

"Yes, sir. I hope you'll excuse me. I know the value you attach to your books, sir, but I assure you I have taken the greatest care of it."

"I hope you in turn, Lush, will excuse me if I go

so far as to ask you what particular subject you were studying ? " said Jim.

" Bimetallism, sir," said Lush ; " and the gold standard," he added.

Jim's jaw dropped. The early hours of this newly-born day promised to rival the previous one in the quality of the surprises provided for him.

" I hope you will excuse me," Lush repeated, " but the evenings seem a little long otherwise, sir, when you come in late."

" They'd seem precious long to me if I read about bimetallism and the gold standard," replied Jim.

" Yes, sir," said Lush respectfully and with truth.

" Have you always taken an interest in these subjects ? " Jim went on.

" No, sir, not always," said Lush, and appeared inclined to leave it at that.

" You interest me strangely, Lush," said Jim. " Sit down ; have a cigar—no, I insist," he added as Lush made a mute protest against this breach of decorum. " The circumstances are unusual, and I insist." And he tossed him the key of his cigar-cabinet.

" Well, sir, if you insist——" began Lush.

" Certainly I do ; and take a big one," said Jim.

So Lush took a big one and lit it and prepared to sit in a straight-backed chair.

" No, no ; make yourself comfortable," said Jim,

and Lush took his seat, albeit a little primly, in one of the hippopotamus arm-chairs.

"Now, Lush," began Jim, still seated on the club fender, "before we proceed with the subject of the 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' I regret very much to inform you that I reluctantly came to the conclusion this evening, and this was before I returned to the flat, that I must dispense with your services forthwith." He raised his hand for silence as Lush started and tried to speak.

"This decision," he continued, "is irrevocable and has only been arrived at after the closest and most careful consideration of all possible circumstances and data. I perceive from your evident emotion, Lush, that you would speak; possibly you would enquire whether I have had cause for any dissatisfaction with you while you have been in my service. Make your mind easy, Lush, I have no such cause. Apart from the recent incident of the 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' with which I am disposed to deal lightly, although I shall probably have a word to say on this matter later, I can truthfully affirm that I have found your services satisfactory in every way and should have no hesitation in providing you with a character which would at once ensure you a post worthy of your talents, if I did not full well realise that in the present unnatural condition of the domestic portion of the labour market, no such character would be either asked for or expected. You have the world at your feet; it is,

in fact, your oyster. I wish, Lush, that it were still mine."

He paused, and Lush was about to speak when he raised his hand again and proceeded:

"You were probably about to enquire when I silenced you just now what reasons I had for taking this step; and though I cannot admit the right of anyone in my service to question any decision which it may seem good to me to make, yet at the same time I am sensible that in severing the bonds which have hitherto united us, I do, in a sense, owe you an explanation. That explanation I shall now proceed to give you. Briefly put, Lush, it is as follows: I am ruined; I am penniless, outcast, bankrupt, despised, rejected and naked."

Lush, who had been listening to his employer with increasing bewilderment and who observed clearly that he was certainly not naked, thought that the other statements might possibly be exaggerated. He accordingly felt justified in saying, "I hope not, sir."

"You hope not?" repeated Jim, who seemed to find this form of echoing rhetorical question a good springboard for further flights of fancy. "You hope not! But your hope is betrayed. Yesterday, Lush, I had great possessions; yesterday I was a gilded youth; I sported like a butterfly in the world of fashion; I tripped through Vanity Fair breaking hearts, gambling, dicing and betting. I was a roué; more, I was a rich roué!"

fell through I'm dashed if I know what on earth I could do. No, Lush, I'm sorry, but you must go. I'll settle up with you and we'll shut up the flat to morrow."

"But you paid a year's rent in advance when you went in, sir," said Lush. "Surely it would be simpler to live here for a bit."

"So I did," said Jim. "I'd forgotten. But I must sell all my things, anyhow. I owe an awful lot to all sorts of people. I must try and pay them, and I can't live in this flat if there's no furniture. Besides some one's got to pay the tradesmen if I'm to have anything to eat."

"You'll excuse my asking," said Lush, "but is this pretty generally known, do you imagine? Enough to damage your credit with your usual tradespeople during the next month or so?"

"No, Lush, it won't do," replied Jim. "As a matter of fact I asked old what's-his-name, the solicitor, just that very question, and as far as I can gather I'm not yet notorious as the disappointed heir. But I can't take advantage of that to live on tick and go on running up accounts. It'd only be a worse smash-up in the end. My one chance is to try and get square now, at once. Then if I go down and out after that, at any rate I've done my best."

"That was not exactly what I meant," said Lush. "I quite realise the arguments against getting in peeper than you are, but I had another idea——"

He stopped suddenly, and rising from his chair began pacing the room, puffing furiously at his cigar and once sending the ash flying over the carpet with a firm and experienced tap from his third finger. From his seat on the fender Jim watched with interest deepening into amazement as this unusual servant strode backwards and forwards past him, a frown on his forehead, absorption in his gaze, his lips occasionally moving and the cigar dwindling visibly before a succession of violent pulls. For the moment Lush appeared completely unconscious of his master's existence and, indeed, of his entire surroundings. What on earth was he doing? Had every one gone mad to-night? In all the years of their relations with one another no suspicion of eccentricity or unconventionality had ever appeared in Lush's outward manner. He had carried to perfection the inhuman calm which marks the masters of his profession; if we have seen him at all put out at Mary's call this afternoon it was a state to which no one but Mary had ever been known to reduce him and must be regarded as so exceptional as hardly to be worth consideration. And he had after all in dealing with the problem of Mary endeavoured only to consider his employer's interests and wishes. But his present strange behaviour was obviously prompted by no such consideration. One had only to look at his lowering brow and his unseeing gaze to realise that his thoughts were far outside this particular room.

"This is all very well," thought Jim. "I expect it is a bit of a surprise to Lush, but hang it all! I've given him surprises before now and he's never gone on like this—or if he has, he's certainly waited till he got outside the room. By Jove! just look at him. I never knew what a chin that man had got until to-night. And how on earth has he managed to suppress that forehead all these years? I swear I've never noticed it before. What can he have been doing to himself? Is he drugged? Why, damn it all! I know what it is. He's got an expression on his face for the first time since I've known him. What an extraordinary difference it makes!"

And then as Lush continued his unparalleled behaviour, Jim called out to him.

"Lush!" he said. "Hi! Lush!"

The amazing Lush paid just enough attention to this interruption to wave an impatient and silencing hand at Jim, and continued his walk without breaking his step.

Jim gasped.

As a man who had for several months done liaison work with the Australians he thought that he was hardened to anything which he was likely to experience in the manner in which his remarks were received. But to be waved aside by one's own servant as something too unimportant to be suffered to break the chain of his thoughts; not even to be vouchsafed a reply of one syllable—this was the absolute limit. As far as it was possible

for one still under the influence of the old Port to do so, he lost his temper.

"Hi! Lush!" he bawled at the top of his voice, and the top of Jim's voice was a sound that once heard was not easily forgotten. "Hi! Do you hear me speaking to you? What the devil do you mean by walking round my room like this? Stop at once. Do you hear me? HI!"

And as the echoes of this last wild yell died away, Lush stopped suddenly and looked mildly round at Jim as one who should say, "Excuse me. I was absorbed in thought. It is possible that a remark of yours escaped me. Perhaps you would be good enough to repeat it?" But of actual words he uttered nothing.

"Look here, Lush," said Jim rather hoarsely, "what on earth is it?"

And at long last Lush spoke.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but I was following up a rather important train of thought which some of your remarks earlier this evening had suggested to me. In fact, I think I may call it a very important train of thought." He cleared his throat. "The matter is so important that I should be very much obliged if you would give it your closest attention now, at once. I think, unless I am mistaken, the suggestions which I have to make should prove of considerable interest to you."

Jim could only gape. Not only had Lush never before to his knowledge spoken so much at one time,

but the utterances, brief and to the point, which he was in the habit of making were always clothed in language such as might be expected from an ex-soldier and present valet. The Lush who had "important trains of thought suggested to him" and asked that "the closest attention might be paid to what should prove of considerable interest" was a new phenomenon to him. His thoughts reverted suddenly to Bimetallism and the Gold Standard, and his jaw dropped still further.

Lush apparently took this silence on the part of his master as consent, for he proceeded at once.

"I think it will be clearer if I begin right at the beginning," he said. "When I was in the army—that is to say after I had first got out to France in the autumn of 1914—I found very shortly that life for me under active service conditions consisted entirely of two emotions, namely Boredom and Fear. Both emotions were at times intense, at times less unbearable. I have known them to overlap and I have known them to alternate, but I was never during the first six months of my time in France free from one or the other of these sensations. I believe I did my job, such as it was, well. I know I was marked out for approval by those over me, both officers and N.C.O.'s. The boredom never actually made me slack in my duties and the fear was my own affair, something that I never communicated to anyone else. And, as you are aware, in these circumstances a soldier is permitted to be as

much afraid as he likes. I would not have you imagine that the fear always overtook me in the front line trenches or the boredom in the rest camps. Frequently the reverse was the case. I can only say again that for the first six months of my time in France I was haunted by these two feelings to the practical exclusion of everything else."

He paused as if to enquire whether he had carried his hearer with him so far.

"Well," said Jim, "now you come to mention it, I'm not sure that I didn't go through much the same sort of thing really, though I'd never put it into words like that. Go on."

"I don't imagine that I was an exception in experiencing these two emotions," said Lush, "but I think I possibly analysed my feelings into these two main divisions sooner and more definitely than most people. And once I had done it I couldn't forget these two bogies, waiting for me all the time, sapping my strength, undermining my nerves, waiting for the time when they could congratulate each other on having broken me right down. Of course, you and I see now that probably all that was wrong was the failure in my case of the individual to be swept away by the machine. I'm not talking of selfishness; I don't think I was more selfish, and I'm almost certain that I was less selfish in matters of give and take than the other Tommies. But somehow or other instead of my particular cogwheel passing smoothly into the machinery

of war—a big enough thing, God knows—their gears slip for a minute, five minutes perhaps, and then by the mercy of Heaven or the stupidity of mankind—they've caught on again. In the new speed. In the new world. But you and I—we can't. We're left spinning between two worlds. I'll tell you something about myself,' he said. 'Believe it or not, I don't care. I was a professor of never mind what at a university in the North of England. I can't go into details, because you wouldn't understand the words I used, but in my own line I was a big man. I started from the bottom; poor parents; but I worked my way up with only one thought in my mind from the beginning and that was to go further in my own subject than anyone else on earth. I worked—Good Lord, how I worked! I battled against poverty, discouragement, disbelief, my own health—everything. At thirty-five I had a name in the world—my world. But that wasn't enough; I had to go further; I had to make everyone realise that I was ahead of the lot of them—that my knowledge began where theirs left off. Silly human pride, I suppose—or monomania. And so I worked harder than ever, always on my one subject, never taking a rest. Everything else went spinning past unnoticed, until one day—I fell in love.

"'For the first time since I had started I neglected my work. She was a student at my course of lectures. Her people lived in the suburbs of the big town. I was mad about her—stark, staring, raving mad. I

arranged meetings, went out to her parents' house and so on. I think she was flattered at first by such attention from a university bigwig, and like a fool I imagined she cared for me. I was overwhelmed by my feeling for her—it was calf-love and man's-love and every other sort of love rolled into one for a poor idiot who had purposely turned his back on that side of life until he was nearly forty. Then, of course, finally one day I asked her to marry me. First she looked surprised. Then she laughed. And with her laughter my gears slipped for good and all.'

"Then he went on to say," continued Lush, "how he had walked about all night and found himself miles from home the next morning. He hurried back and arrived late for one of his lectures and began speaking. In the middle of the lecture, apparently, he broke down. Tried to start again and fainted. Of course every one put it down to overwork and he himself thought at first it was due to his long walk in the night. But when he got up again after the day or two in bed which he was ordered and went into his laboratory, he found not that he had forgotten anything—his memory was as good as ever—but his interest in his work, the work which had been his whole existence, had gone—absolutely gone. He just didn't care tuppence suddenly for anything connected with it.

"Then apparently a long holiday was arranged for him—the first he had ever had. But he couldn't rest and almost as soon as he had started he chucked

it up and went back to the university—only to find that he couldn't keep his thoughts on his work for three minutes—just didn't care any longer; just couldn't get back the sense of proportion which had made his own career the centre of everything, and couldn't acquire a fresh sense of proportion to take its place.

"Well, that was his story, and according to him things had gone from bad to worse until finally he had sent in his resignation about five minutes before he would otherwise have got the sack. He hadn't saved anything and he sank and sank—trying to take up his interest in life again on lower and lower levels, and never succeeding. When the war came he had enlisted, knocking seven or eight years off his age for the purpose, and there he was at the end of it all in that reading-room with his eyes burning through everything.

"I've often thought of his story since and I'm pretty certain now that in telling it he had left out the real reason at the bottom of it all; the drink or the drug that had really brought him down. But at the time it had an extraordinary effect on me, and more even than his story his idea about my having slipped between two worlds and that being the reason for the rotten state I had got into.

"He said then that the only thing for me was to build up a fresh world for myself, one that I could set my feet on and that no one could knock away from beneath me; and he began jawing about how

education could do this for me, although it couldn't do anything for him because he'd had too much of it. He was all for getting books for me and so on, and even threatened to lecture to me himself. He almost got excited over it.

"Well, I can tell you, sir, he made an extraordinary impression on me. And at the moment I almost believed all he was saying, and the thought of getting this new world for myself almost drove away my boredom and my fear for that afternoon. The next day we went up to the line again, and about five minutes after we'd got there this professor of mine got a sniper's bullet clean through his head. I don't know why, but though I'd never much taken to him I felt worse over that than when many a better pal of mine went.

"I'm afraid I've taken a long time telling you all this, sir, but I want you to understand the whole thing. Our spell in the trenches for some reason or other was shorter than usual that time, and when we came down again I was still thinking over all that chap's stuff about education. I was looking through a magazine one day, when I saw an advertisement of a mind-training college—I think that was what they called it. They set out to improve your memory by post and so on, and offered prizes for the pupils who got through examinations on their system in the shortest time. 'Well,' I thought, 'this may not be the sort of education that my old professor was thinking about, but it's about the only sort I'm

likely to get hold of out here,' and I sent in the coupon for the first booklet.

" Now I'm getting nearer the point of all this, sir, and to cut my story short I won the first prize in that competition in six weeks. And I'd won more than that. For the last four weeks of those six I'd forgotten to feel bored or afraid. I don't mean that I didn't always have a healthy amount of fear of whiz-bangs and so on, but not that awful fear of I didn't know what that had been driving me mad.

" Well, sir, as soon as I'd won that prize I started in again and took two other correspondence courses at the same time; one on ' Success in Life ' and the other on ' Poultry-keeping for Small Gardens.' I found I had the most extraordinary knack of getting through these courses. I couldn't get the books quickly enough, and before I'd finished these two I was learning how to be a Chartered Accountant and a Civil Engineer at the same time—all by post. From that time onwards I never stopped. Every minute I could spare I was doing one of these courses; I got a craving for them—got my pals at home to hunt round for any that might have slipped past me. And I did them all equally well, though I dare say I shouldn't say so. Anything that came in weekly parts through the post I'd get to the bottom of at once, and I couldn't forget it—it was a trick of my brain, I suppose, that I'd suddenly happened on by chance. At any rate, I know that when they started sending lecturers out to the army and I went

and listened to one or two of them it all went through my head like water through a sieve. I could only learn from serialised manuals.

"I did the 'History of the World,' 'Health and Happiness,' 'How to speak like a Gentleman,' 'How to become a Company Secretary'; I did the training courses for solicitors' clerks, architects, master mariners, district nurses, sanitary inspectors, hypnotists and insurance agents. At one time I made myself out a candidate for ordination and at another a Young Man with Weak Will—anything so that I could take the course. I had a long spell in hospital once with trench fever, and as soon as my temperature had gone down I did one course for medical students and one for faith-healers. You may think I am exaggerating, sir, but I assure you I am not. As far as I can see I might have gone on for ever and never guessed that I had this side to me, if that ex-professor hadn't talked to me that afternoon in 1915 about education—and even so, if he had lived and tried to direct my studies himself he'd have probably given me up as a dunce in a fortnight.

"Well, things went on like this for about three years. Of course, you understand that I was out in France the whole time, and there were good stretches when things were too hot even for me to keep my mind on a correspondence course. But taking it all round, I must have gone through hundreds of these courses, and every word in every

one of them had stuck in my head. I take no credit for this; it just was so.

"In the late summer of 1918, after you know how many disappointments and set-backs, the boys out there got a real feeling that the end was coming; something different from any of those curious outbursts of hope that we'd had off and on for years—something steadier. It suddenly struck me that if my number didn't go up in the next few months there was a very fair chance of my living to see the end of the war, even of eventually getting out of the army again; and like lots of our fellows, I began thinking what I should do in civil life. At that time a lot of them couldn't take this idea more seriously than just to say how when they were out of the army they'd never get up for breakfast, or never eat plum-and-apple, or never be sober, or how they'd pay out the sergeant-major in some way or another; but I couldn't help looking at it a bit more practically; possibly my course on 'System' was bearing fruit. I realised that I had an enormous amount of information at my disposal now and that though in my first craze for picking up everything I had acquired a good deal that could probably never be used, yet at the same time if I could only sort out the best part of it I should find myself a good way on the road towards a better profession than valeting. For a short time I thought of going on the halls and answering questions from memory, but that's no game for an intelligent man; you'd agree with

me if you ever heard the sort of questions these people get asked; I don't suppose they get more than fifty or sixty different ones in a year. You see people don't go to music-halls to think out difficult questions or to acquire erudite information, and I bet if you followed one of these men round you'd find he was asked what year the Derby was run in a snowstorm five nights out of six. It would be heartbreaking. No; I turned the matter over in my mind for a long time, and I was still really thinking about it when the Boches threw up the sponge. To every one's surprise we found that we weren't given a medal and sent home, but it looked for a bit as if we'd about as much chance of getting out of the army now as we had in the middle of the Somme; and whenever I tried to get an hour or so to put in some steady thinking about my own future, I found I was detailed to go and listen to a concert party or some other form of military discipline broke in. I came to the conclusion that I must get demobilised quickly, and when I was home on leave, as you will remember, sir, the idea came to me that possibly one of the gentlemen who used to be at Mrs. Turvis' might be willing to help me with my papers in return for the services of a good valet. I felt I owed you the first chance of taking advantage of this opportunity, because you may remember that you were trying to get me to come to you in 1914. Fortunately for me my plan succeeded, and as a gentleman's valet I had the spare time and the

solitude which I required for the scheme which I had finally decided on. I hope I am not boring you, sir?"

"Not at all," said Jim, who had indeed followed this autobiography with interest and amazement, although its length had some time ago compelled him to change his seat on the fender for a more comfortable arm-chair. "You remind me of the Arabian Nights. And are we really coming to the point now?"

"We are, sir," said Lush.

"Well, fire away then," said Jim. "And take another cigar if you want it."

"A little later, if I may," said Lush politely, and continued his story.

"What I had decided to do when I came to you, sir, was to use the leisure and freedom from interruption to draw up carefully on paper a series of schemes by which I could utilise the knowledge that I had acquired to further my own progress in life. It was the first time that I had really ever endeavoured to apply any of this knowledge to any practical purpose and the effort to do so was at first considerable, even with the help of the series of lessons on 'How to be a Force in Life' that I had taken. I was not discouraged, however, by the difficulties I met with, and gradually there grew up a set of schemes any one of which, I was and am still convinced, would if carried through lead to my rapid advancement and increasing success in the world's

struggle. I found, however, that there remained now not only the difficulty of making a final selection of the scheme or schemes that I should adopt, although this was a very serious and responsible matter, but a greater difficulty still stood in my way in every case, which at the outset I am bound to admit I had not considered. In fact, I may say that two main difficulties stood in my path, although they did not both always put a stop to the same scheme." Again he paused for a moment, and Jim courteously enquired what those two difficulties were.

"I will tell you, sir," said Lush. "I found in the case of every scheme that when every possible eventuality had been considered and success seemed assured, I was invariably prevented from putting it into immediate execution by the absence of one or both of two essential factors. Briefly, these two obstacles may be described as Money and Manner."

"Money and Manner?" repeated Jim. "I'm afraid I don't quite follow."

"I will explain," said Lush imperturbably. "And for this purpose let us take an example. I have for instance in my pantry a scheme by which I will not say anyone, but I will certainly say anyone with my knowledge, could indubitably make in a short time a very large fortune in the stock markets. No," he added, as a look of incredulity appeared in Jim's face, "it's not the usual system of supposedly inside information, which will inevitably let you down in the end, nor does it correspond

to any so-called system at Monte Carlo, where the outrageous pretence is made of reducing pure chance to fixed laws; moreover, it is perfectly straight and above-board and in entire conformity with the rules of the House. It is in spite of all this a certainty, but a certainty that would never occur to anyone who was not equally well up in finance and meteorology—a very unusual combination. Well, why don't I leave you and carry out this scheme?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Jim, "why you don't."

"I will tell you," said Lush. "The scheme requires to start it a certain amount of capital, which I do not possess. It remains, therefore, untried.

"To take another example. I have also in my Pantry" (the dignity which Lush managed to give to this word was indescribable) "a cut-and-dried scheme of insurance which would indemnify the policy-holders against the receipt of any class of the Order of the British Empire. I have worked out the risks so carefully, and the demand for this policy would naturally be so great that I think it would be possible to start with practically no capital and still clear a very large annual profit. But here again there is an obstacle to the immediate and successful launching of the scheme. It is clear that circumstances being what they are it would not be desirable to reach possible subcribers by means of public advertisement. One would have to rely on private canvassing by specially selected agents in order to

get the thing well started. And how am I, in my present position, to get into touch with such agents? If only I were in the rank of life which naturally possesses friends in the first division of the Civil Service or in the better-known Naval and Military clubs, the scheme could be gone through with at once. But as things are, I am severely-handicapped and the plan remains on paper. Do you follow me?"

"Quite," said Jim.

"These are but two examples," continued Lush, "drawn at random from the numerous ideas which I have worked out; but I should be pleased to give you further examples if you think I have not made my point quite clear."

"No, no," said Jim. "Please go on."

"Thank you, sir. I think I have demonstrated by the examples which I have selected that the only two obstacles which prevent my immediately making a very considerable financial success are lack of capital and lack of those advantages in the way of upbringing which cannot be obtained in weekly or fortnightly parts. You have probably heard the first cause advanced so often as a reason for adopting a policy of *laissez-faire* that you may be inclined to prejudge my claims to originality in the means which I have devised for laying out any capital which might pass into my control."

"My dear Lush," answered Jim, "your originality is absolutely undisputed. Pray proceed."

"I was about to remark," said Lush, "that but for

the facts about your private affairs which you were good enough to confide to me earlier this evening, I should not have mentioned my plans to you at all. I have already put my theories into practice on a small scale during the last few months and have managed to increase very considerably the nest-egg which I had set aside out of my army pay; and I am confident that this increase would continue by the same means with growing rapidity, were it necessary. My idea had been to remain with you, sir, until I had set aside a clear thousand pounds, which I then proposed to adventure in one or more of the ways which have occurred to me as the result of my reading. If I succeeded we should probably have parted. If I failed you would have been none the wiser.

"But your remarks to me earlier to-night have thrown a fresh light on all my arrangements, and I now have a proposal to make to you to which I earnestly beg you to give your best and most favourable consideration, as I am convinced that it will lead to our very great mutual advantage."

If Lush had been a little less absorbed in his own torrent of language and in the cogency of his own train of argument, he might have noticed that during the last few minutes Jim's eyes had more than once momentarily closed, and that his body was almost imperceptibly acquiring a more and more horizontal position in the big arm-chair. The final stage of the old Port was drawing to a close.

At these last words from his valet, however, Jim made a great effort and forced his body back through several degrees of the arc which it had gradually been describing in the chair. It will for ever remain doubtful how much of Lush's remarks had really penetrated to his master's brain on this eventful evening. Certainly Jim could never afterwards call to mind any very clear summary of the stages by which the final situation was reached. I hesitate to enrage the reader by yet another reference to the effects of the old Port, but I may perhaps just be allowed to remind that undoubtedly gentle person that Mr. Grant's intellect must not be hastily judged by any evidence drawn from his behaviour on this particular evening. He had certainly heard a great deal of what Lush had been saying, but then he had also been thinking a good deal about Mary and about Mr. Cash and about all sorts of other things, and all in that wonderfully distant and unattached mode of thought which is only possible in the condition in which he was. Lush's behaviour had struck him as odd, but not so very much odder after all than the fact that he was ruined; and both phenomena seemed somehow or other pleasantly remote and delightfully unimportant compared with his own astonishing feeling of physical well-being.

When, however, Lush towards the end of his oration descended to personalities, and when in particular he referred to his own and his employer's

my word to do so. Of course, it is only my word; but then it is only twenty-four hours; and if at the end of that time I've disappeared, you will have taken the number or numbers of the bank-notes which you give me and can have me arrested and charged with stealing them from you. To the world I should still be your servant, and you would have an easy case to prove. You see I am trusting you too to a certain extent.

"Your other chief objection is the fear that I should attempt to force you for the purpose of my plans into using your social position to assist me in ways that you couldn't consider; that I should endeavour to make you tout for subscriptions to shady companies, sell wine and motors on commission, or indulge in some form of blackmail. You rightly feel that anything of this description would be absolutely out of the question. Believe me that I have no intention of ever suggesting that you should do anything of the sort. Here also you have only my word for it, but it is a word that has never been broken yet.

"These seem to be most probably your greatest reasons for objecting. Have you any others?"

Was it fear of starting Lush off once more, or the overwhelming approach of sleep, or the power of the valet's eye and the strength of his will? Was Jim really convinced by the extraordinary story he had just heard, or did he only think that this leap in the dark could not after all leave him so very much

worse off and might even by one chance in a million save him? Was his judgment distorted or purified by the last flickers of the expiring Port? I cannot say which reason had most weight with him; possibly it was none of these and he merely thought to clutch at a straw which might keep him in the same world as Mary Steele for a few minutes before he went down for good. In this uncertainty let me record effects and not causes.

Lush had paused after his last enquiry, and for a minute or two there had been silence in the room. The early morning light was beginning to steal in past the blinds and curtains, and the faint freshness of a London dawn was making itself known outside in contrast to the stale stuffiness of the sitting-room and the white faces of the two men. A distant and unexpected metropolitan cock greeted the returning day with a hoarse cockney crow. Jim's hand slipped into his inner breast pocket and extracted a note-case. He rose suddenly to his feet and threw it across to his man, who caught it neatly.

"All right, Lush," he said, "I'm on." And immediately the look of decision passed from his face and he stood tottering with sleep, as if uncertain which way to fall.

"Thank you," said Lush. "You won't regret this."

He crossed to the window to let in some more air, and as he passed his former master and present

partner that exhausted individual sank back heavily into the chair from which he had just risen. Lush gave one look at him ; he was fast asleep.

A few minutes later the outer door of the flat clicked.

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO FOLLOWS IMMEDIATELY

PART TWO

FRIDAY

I

THERE used to be a convention followed by writers of novels—it is indeed still followed by some—that when they had succeeded in working up to what they considered a moment of breathless interest in their story, they should break off abruptly and start a fresh chapter dealing with a totally new set of characters placed in a totally new scene. Thus for example if Chapter LXIV ended with the words "the licking tongues of flame were creeping nearer and nearer to the powder-barrel. At this moment a terrible shriek was heard," then it was a point of honour that Chapter LXV should begin: "Flora awoke refreshed after her night in the hermit's cave, and after a draught of warm milk provided by the good old man's herd of goats, prepared to continue her journey." It is possible that authors, who are an innocent race, really imagined that this system heightened the interest in their narratives

instead of merely irritating their readers to a point of frenzy, or at the best compelling them to skip in order to find out more about the powder-barrel and the terrible shriek. And as it is well known that once a reader starts skipping he never stops, but takes longer and wilder leaps each time, I do not propose to adopt this scheme in the present instance, but, on the contrary, to raise the curtain again on very much the same scene as that on which it fell at the end of the previous part.

Jim slept long and soundly after his tiring day. At half-past seven Mrs. Pretty mounted the stairs as usual, carrying (also as usual) a small black bag, and to her surprise found the front door of the flat shut. It may be necessary to explain here briefly that Jim's staff consisted of Lush, who slept on the premises and acted as combined valet and butler, and of the above-mentioned Mrs. Pretty, who arrived every morning from some unknown lair, carrying a little black bag, and performed the duties of cook and housemaid, departing again with the bag strangely inflated at an hour which varied according to whether Jim was dining at his rooms or not. Whether owing to a shortage of latchkeys or to mistrust of the feminine sense of responsibility with regard to these articles, Lush had never arranged for Mrs. Pretty to be given a key, but had formed the habit of leaving the outer door of the flat ajar in the early morning, which enabled her to make a silent entrance without disturbing Mr Grant. Accordingly

on this particular morning she was considerably taken back at finding the door closed, and having had impressed on her on several occasions Mr. Grant's extreme aversion to being disturbed in the early morning she waited some time before attempting to ring. After waiting quite a quarter of an hour, however, and the door still remaining closed, she applied her finger to the electric bell-push and awaited results; but Jim slept on undisturbed, and eventually Mrs. Pretty desisted. She now recalled to mind that a similar difficulty had once before met her on this same doorstep, and that on that occasion she had on making enquiries from Sergeant Pink found that master and man had gone off suddenly for an unexpected week-end visit, having only had time to communicate their intentions to her by means of a verbal message left with the sergeant. She accordingly descended the stairs and found the commissionaire, attired mostly in grey flannel shirt and green baize apron, smoking a pipe in the hall.

"No, ma," said he in response to her enquiry. "No message nor nothing. But I reckon you're right and they've both slipped off somewhere and forgotten to tell anyone this time. Must 'ave gone late last night after I'd left the 'all, I expect, cos they 'adn't gone then. Rang for five minutes, did yer? Well, if they was there they'd 'ave 'eard you, and the door being shut that proves it to my mind. You'd better leave it. Look in 'ere when you come

thing about leaving the numbers of the notes, it was true, but of course he hadn't.

"Yes," thought Jim. "I've been done in the eye and it serves me right, I suppose. I've got a story I can't possibly go to the police with—and I'm in the devil of a hole. But my word! I'm hungry; and I can't go out like this."

There followed a sound of rushing water, of splashings not unaccompanied by snatches of song—the usual signs that the occupant of the flat was having a bath. Passing to his bedroom he selected, with some difficulty, a more or less complete set of garments, and a few minutes later he was dashing downstairs. He flew past an astonished Pink and proceeded rapidly towards his Club. Half-way there he just avoided bumping into another pedestrian, and in turning round to glance at him before deciding whether to scowl or apologise, he descried a countenance which seemed familiar. For a moment he couldn't put a name to it, and then suddenly and simultaneously with a dawning light of recognition in the other's eyes he realised that it was Croft, his uncle's personal secretary.

"How are you?" said Jim. "I was tearing along so, I'm afraid I nearly cut you. I hope I didn't tread on your toes too hard just then."

"It was my fault," replied Mr. Croft. I'm afraid I wasn't looking. How are you getting on? I've been wondering once or twice lately whether I shouldn't look you up."

He stopped abruptly as if he regretted having made this last observation, and a look of slight surprise appeared in Jim's face which was partly due to the sudden way in which Mr. Croft had pulled himself up and partly to what he had just said. During all the time that he had known the personal secretary their relations had been of the most formal and business-like nature, and they had never got anywhere near the terms on which people usually are before they talk of looking each other up. An impulse seized him.

"Look here," he said, "why don't you come along and have some lunch with me at the Club? You've not had lunch yet, have you?"

"There is nothing I should like better," replied Mr. Croft, "but unfortunately I have an engagement to play chess with a man at Mulford's immediately after lunch and I'm afraid I shouldn't have time. However," he added rather nervously, as if doubting how the offer would be met, "I should be very glad if you would join me there, that is to say if——"

"Of course I will," interrupted Jim. "Only look here, the lunch has got to be mine. Partly because I asked you first and partly because I've had no breakfast, and I'd be ashamed to eat what I'm going to if I was anyone's guest. Come along—it's this way, isn't it?"

They turned and walked off together.

Mulford's is entered from the corner of a mysteri-

partment. These two coupés are much sought after by visitors who wish to combine business with refreshment, as in the midday roar, which rages from twelve to three o'clock, the occupants of these retreats can discuss their most private and intimate affairs without any danger of being overheard.

As it happened the coupé on the ground floor was being vacated just as Jim and Mr. Croft arrived, and by a common impulse they both dashed towards it and secured it for themselves. Mr. Croft appeared to be well known in this place, as even during his race across the room he had had time to nod to three or four of the other lunchers, and almost as soon as they were seated a waiter hurried towards their corner.

"Good morning, Frederick," said Mr. Croft to the waiter.

"Morning, sir; nice leg of mutton just on," said the waiter, much as another man might have said, "fine day."

"That suit you?" said Mr. Croft to Jim.

"Capital," said Jim. "And I want a lot."

"Mutton twice for this gentleman, Frederick," said Mr. Croft. "Mutton for me. Boiled and cabbage. Half of bitter."

"Pint for me," said Jim to the waiter.

"Right, sir," said Frederick, and vanished.

"I used to come to this place a lot when I was working for your uncle," said Mr. Croft, turning towards Jim. "And now that I've retired I like

to come up here two or three times a week to play chess. Do you play chess?" he added.

"I'm afraid not," said Jim.

"Fine game," said Mr. Croft. "Some wonderful players here." Jim looked round the room knowingly, as if he expected to recognise some of the wonderful players; but as there were no very obvious means of identifying them, he contented himself with saying that he'd always heard it was a wonderful place for chess. There was a pause for a moment, and then Frederick reappeared carrying the whole order on one arm, dashed it down with superb verve on the narrow table and again vanished.

"So you've retired altogether now, have you?" said Jim after a minute or two.

"Yes," said Mr. Croft. "I'm getting on, you know. Not so young as I was. And I had a good job with Sir Alfred. He got me an annuity some years ago and I'm very comfortable and contented now."

"Did he though?" thought Jim. "I wish he'd got me one while he was about it."

"Seen Puxleys' yet?" continued Mr. Croft, munching away.

"Saw 'em yesterday," said Jim casually, as if he were in the habit of frequently calling on his uncle's solicitors and thought nothing of it.

"Ah!" said Mr. Croft, and took a pull at his beer. "Pretty fair mess wasn't there?"

Jim saw no point in attempting to conceal the

truth from the ex-secretary, so he agreed that there was a pretty fair mess.

"Do you know how you stand?" asked Mr. Croft.

"Near enough," said Jim.

"And you don't think much of it, I suppose?"

"Well, it wasn't quite what I expected," answered Jim a little guardedly.

"Of course, it wasn't my job to know all about your uncle's city affairs," Mr. Croft went on, "but I could hardly help seeing a thing or two. And then I was there when he had his stroke." He paused for a moment in thought, and then, bending over his mutton and apparently addressing his plate, he added, "Did Puxleys' happen to mention a man called Lloyd?"

"Yes," said Jim. "They did. I think, in fact, they told me rather more about him than they meant to."

"Ah!" said Mr. Croft again. "Did they say anything about the quarrel?"

"Yes," said Jim.

"Did they say what it was about?"

"No," said Jim. "They didn't."

"Ah!" said Mr. Croft for the third time. "Golden roll after this," he added loudly as Frederick's circling orbit brought him again within hail.

"Same for me," said Jim a little louder still.

"Twice, Frederick," yelled Mr. Croft.

"Right, sir," came the answering cry from the other end of the room.

"Haven't very much time," murmured Mr. Croft to Jim. "But in case we don't meet again for a bit, I'd like to tell you something."

He crumbled his bread and resumed.

"Your uncle and Sir Adolf Lloyd used to do a good deal together before the war. Then they split apart, and I'll tell you why. This is something that Puxleys' don't know and I dare say I'm an old fool to tell you, but I'm out of it all now, and after all I owe everything I've ever made to Sir Alfred. Well, listen to me. In 1913—yes, 1913—a young fellow —it doesn't matter about his name; he's dead now, killed in the war—came with an introduction to Sir Alfred. He was the junior partner in a Midland iron and steel business. Educated man; been through technical colleges and so on; had travelled quite a bit. He'd been messing about with experiments and that sort of thing, and he'd found, or thought he'd found, a kind of alloy which was going to take the place of copper for all sorts of purposes—electric things and so on. I don't understand these matters myself. Anyhow, I know that according to his statements the stuff could be made from raw materials found in this country and at a cost that would not exactly knock the bottom out of the copper market, but still all the same it compared quite favourably with the prices ruling at the time. He'd tried to get his firm to take it up, but you see

it wasn't their line exactly and they didn't care about the risk. However, your uncle had found them some money a few years before when they'd been making a big extension, and as he'd not done so badly out of it the other partners thought he might be interested in this discovery. So they sent this fellow up to London with an introduction to Sir Alfred, and I suppose the idea was that if things went well a syndicate should be formed to exploit the invention. I know all this because the first interview between these two was at the flat, and I was had in to take notes. To hear the chap talk you'd certainly have thought it was a good thing, and he had with him a lot of samples and reports and formulæ which to me seemed convincing enough. But your uncle naturally wanted to get an independent opinion on the value of the thing, and so these samples and so on were left behind in the flat for the time being, and the junior partner went off. He was to come back in two or three days and meanwhile your uncle was going to submit the idea to Sir James Kilby and get his views on it. I remember this young chap told your uncle to take special care of the things. He said he'd protected his ideas in the United Kingdom, but he didn't want the thing to get about for the time being."

Mr. Croft interrupted himself here for a moment to call for Bath Olivers and Stilton for both, but immediately resumed his story.

"Well," he continued, "that same evening Sir

Adolf was dining with your uncle at the flat. It was one of the nights that I had to stay on late, so naturally I heard a good deal of the conversation. Sir Alfred described his visit from the inventor and the nature of his process, mentioning that he thought it seemed a good thing for them both to have a hand in. Sir Adolf, rather to my surprise, ran the whole idea down. I remember he said that German chemists and metallurgists had been after the same thing for years, and though they had done wonders they had never been able to turn out anything that could possibly be said to take the place of copper. The subject was dropped, but later in the evening Sir Adolf suddenly asked if he might see the samples of the new metal. Your uncle got them out of a cupboard where they had been put for safety together with the various papers relating to them, and plumped the lot on the table. Sir Adolf had a good look at them but still stuck to his point of view about the impossibility of the thing being up to what was claimed for it. I then put everything on the table back again in the cupboard and locked the door.

" A couple of days later when I was working in my own little room there, your uncle rang for me to go in to him. I went in at once and found him with an elderly gentleman whom he introduced to me as Sir James Kilby. ' Look here, Croft,' he said. ' when you put those things away for me the other night in the cupboard, are you quite sure you left nothing out ? '

"'Quite sure, sir,' I said.

"'Because,' he went on, 'when Sir James and I got them out just now, we found that the long envelope with the actual formula in it was missing. Do you remember putting it away?'

"I told them I couldn't remember positively. There had been quite a quantity of papers with the samples. I added that I had locked the cupboard and put the key with the others in Sir Alfred's desk.

"'Yes, yes,' he said. 'I found it there.'

"Then he turned to Sir James and said that he was extremely sorry to have brought him there for nothing. The actual description of the process had evidently been mislaid, and it was probably waste of time for him to apply any tests to the samples without it. I don't know what Sir James felt about it, but I think he must have seen that something was wrong; at any rate he didn't press for any further information on the subject, and shortly afterwards he went off.

"The envelope was never found. The man whose invention the thing was was in the deuce of a state about it and I believe managed to get a lot of compensation out of Sir Alfred before he went off elsewhere with another copy of his formula. I've heard that he did quite well with it before he was killed, as they were just starting to make it on a commercial scale when the war began.

"This was all I knew of the story at the time, and

it wasn't until a year or so later that I got the rest of it. It seems that your uncle had at once reported the loss of the envelope to Sir Adolf, who denied ever having seen it himself and suggested that I had probably gone off with it. I admit that there was just as much evidence against me as against anyone else, if not more; but Sir Alfred had known me for twenty years and more, and he stuck up for me.

"Lloyd got in a fury at this, and said that then he supposed he was being accused of having stolen the thing, and this scene was the beginning of the coolness between the two men.

"Your uncle told me all this some time in 1915, and this was how he came to tell me. Old Lloyd had —still has for all I know—a son, called by the name of Harry, who was in his father's business. This young gentleman was in Germany at the outbreak of war, but for some unknown reason, although he was certainly of military age, they let him go and he came back to England. According to Harry he had been released by the Germans on condition that he gave his word not to take up arms against them, but I fancy he didn't feel altogether sure that this was going to keep him clear of the authorities at home. At any rate towards the end of 1915 your uncle got a note from Sir Adolf saying he was proposing to send Harry to America to look into some business of his there, and suggesting that Sir Alfred might like to make use of him too. More grist to

circumstances he must decline to have anything to do with Mr. Harry Lloyd's American trip, and I remember that he here made some parenthetical remarks to me comparing the said Harry with you—very much to the former's disadvantage. He went on to give a few opinions on the subject of traitors generally and pro-German traitors in particular, but the letter was not weakened by being too long. It was a very good letter," said Mr. Croft thoughtfully, " but a very unwise one. Sir Adolf answered a day or two later saying that he had shown it to his solicitor who had advised him to disregard it. I think he must have made that bit up. He went on to say that he did not think that your uncle would find that he had gained either by insulting a fellow-countryman or by breaking loose from his arrangements with his (Sir Adolf's) firm. The rest of the story I expect you have heard from Puxleys'."

Jim nodded.

" To my mind," continued Mr. Croft, " your uncle did all that could be done. Personally I am absolutely convinced that Lloyd took those papers and got them or copies of them through to Germany. He knew the war was coming all right. But I'll say this for him, that he has covered up his tracks pretty successfully, and though I don't suppose he would altogether welcome the advertisement, I fancy he could face a very stiff cross-examination in the matter—that is supposing there were any kind of

enquiry made to-day—without giving the show away."

"And what was the second letter that my uncle dictated to you?" said Jim.

"The second letter was never answered," replied Mr. Croft. "It was to the inventor of the copper substitute. Your uncle said that he couldn't blame him for writing as he had, and begged him when he was next on leave to let him know, as he would do everything in his power to get to the bottom of the affair. I think it is possible that they might have done something if they had got together over it, but the letter came back three or four weeks later marked 'Killed in Action.'"

There was a long pause. And then just as Jim was going to speak, Frederick reappeared round the corner of the compartment. "Mr. Steinwicz says are you coming up for your game with him now, sir?" he said to Mr. Croft.

"Yes—tell him at once," said Mr. Croft, rising to his feet. "I must go, I'm afraid. No idea I'd been so long. Now mind you," he turned to Jim, "I've never told anyone else what I've told you, and I suppose I'm the only person who knows as much of the whole story. Perhaps it would have been better to have said nothing, but I've had it on my conscience since your uncle's death when I realised what you'd been done out of and the reason for it. And one other thing," he added, and the words came like an echo of Mr. Cash the night before. "Don't

that matter, could say "Robinson and Cleaver." As the cab had been pulled up immediately side by side with a pre-war lorry, the engine of which could only be kept in action by tying the foot accelerator down with a piece of wire, it is not surprising that the taxi-driver was unconscious that his craft had been boarded. The next instant the obstruction in the traffic was dissolved and the cab jerked itself forward again. Jim slammed the door behind him.

"Jim, you brute!" said the other occupant of the vehicle, "get out! Do you hear me? Get out at once, or I'll push you out."

"I can't possibly," said Jim. "The beastly thing is going much too fast, and if you push me out it will be murder."

"Well, stop the cab then."

"Never!"

"Then for Heaven's sake sit down instead of crouching like that—no, not this side—one of those little seats will do for you. I must say I like your cheek, you—you white slaver! Now I know how you spend your afternoons when I'm away. Well, you've done it once too often this time, and found some one you know. I hope it will be a lesson to you."

"No really, Mary," said Jim. "I saw your nose when I was standing on the pavement. I couldn't mistake it. I've never done this before. I acted on impulse, like the Crouch End murderer the other

day. And they let him off, you know, because he'd served his country."

"Well, they won't let him off next time," replied Mary, "so you'd better be careful."

"To change the conversation," said Jim brightly, "Where are you going? I say, this seat's beastly uncomfortable; I wish you'd let me sit over there."

"I'm going to Waterloo to meet Father," said Mary, "so I'm afraid I shall have to collect your share of the fare before we get there. And you'll sit where I tell you."

"You won't talk to me like that when we're married," said Jim.

"Now that'll do," said Mary. "But perhaps you'd better come and sit this side while I put my head out of the window and tell the man to stop. I'd ask you to do it, but in the first place I don't trust you, and in the second place the driver would think that his beautiful fare had been bewitched if he suddenly saw your ugly face coming round the corner, and he might drive us into something."

"Well, but wait a minute. What time's your train?" asked Jim, taking his seat as requested.

"I've no idea. I've got to meet Father at half-past three at platform something-or-other—I can't quite remember the number, but there's lots of time. Now come on, let me get at the window."

"Half a minute. Where's Pelman?"

(Pelman, it should perhaps be explained was the name by which Mary's maid, whose real name was

all! why did he always want to blow his nose so much whenever he had just said good-bye to the creature? At this moment he suddenly realised that a hawker was endeavouring to sell him a guide to the Houses of Parliament. He declined the offer and turned away, walking slowly along the street. Mary's last remark, now. What the dickens did she mean? He couldn't deny that it had given him a pleasantly warm feeling to be addressed by her as "My poor Jim"—if the cab hadn't gone off at that moment he'd have told her the whole of his troubles there and then. What a lovely voice she had too! But then what did she mean by calling him an ape? Why "ape"? So like Mary to leave you with a remark like that, the inner meanings of which one spent wakeful nights trying to guess. And why hadn't he asked her when she was coming back? Well, anyhow he'd got her address and she'd promised to write to him. Only he couldn't go on like this much longer without telling her the mess he'd got into. All very well to keep it back when announcing it gave the appearance of criticising her father, but it wasn't fair to go on for ever pretending things were just the same. He'd better leave it now, though, until he saw her again. No good writing that sort of thing unless you were there to watch the person's face when they read the letter.

He felt flat and stale. The post-Mary reaction had again set in. After all he thought he'd go home to his flat. But he mustn't take a cab; that sort of

thing must stop. He knew he'd seen an underground station just now somewhere ; he'd turn back until he found it. He did turn back, and almost immediately discovered Westminster station. He entered, asked for and received a ticket to Dover Street and descended the stairs.

The subterranean journey from Westminster to Dover Street is by no means an easy one, and though experts would find no difficulty in telling you how it should be done, they could only advise their worst enemies to use the underground for traversing this route. Jim was certainly no expert, and he made a bad start by descending the nearest and consequently the wrong stairway. With his thoughts still occupied with his recent cab ride, he entered a train. When he next thought of looking out of the window he was just being withdrawn from Sloane Square, and even so inexperienced a traveller as our hero realised instantly that he was certainly a good deal further from Dover Street than he had been when he started. He determined to leave the train and make further enquiries at the next station. But the train gave a fierce hoot just before the next station and dashed through it—also through the next, and the next, and the next. At Baron's Court it drew up and Jim was on the platform while it was still moving. He felt it wasn't the kind of train that one could trust.

Had he but known it, it was now in his power to

ascend the stairs, avoiding the ticket-collector's eye, and redescend to the Piccadilly Tube, so arriving at Dover Street by a circuitous and lengthy route, but after all with only one change. But he had just seen the words "Alight here for Queen's Club" on an enamelled iron notice-board, and he knew Queen's Club. He had played tennis there. There were, moreover, as he remembered, omnibuses that ran from Piccadilly past Olympia. And he had often noticed Olympia when driving to Queen's Club. His mind was made up. He would shake the dust of this unreliable railway from his feet and walk to that omnibus.

So he went up the stairs, and having paid the excess fare on his ticket was free to search for his omnibus.

About twenty minutes later he arrived for the second time at the gates of a large cemetery, having in the meantime passed through a quantity of streets in which he had no desire to live, but having seen no sign of an omnibus. There was, however, a policeman, and Jim asked him, as he thought politely, if he could kindly tell him the way to Piccadilly. The policeman gave him a curious look and turned away without answering. Jim stared after him as he diminished in the perspective of an interminable road. He had recognised the look which the policeman had given him. It was the same look which he had himself once given to a seedy-looking stranger who had stopped him in

Berkeley Street and asked him the way to Southampton.

He set off on his tramp again.

About a quarter of an hour after this he arrived outside a large public-house in front of which was standing a deserted taxicab, the flag of its meter draped in a large and unfashionable glove. He gazed at this vehicle longingly. Twice or three times he stiffened his lip and prepared to resume his march, but each time his resolution failed him. Finally he approached the swing-doors of the public bar and inserted his head. He saw, as he had hoped to see, the driver of the derelict cab engaged in refreshing himself with an unpleasant-looking meal.

"Ten bob if you'll take me to Piccadilly," he said.

"Make it twelve, gov'nor," said the driver, "and I'll take you as soon as I've finished my tea."

It seemed a curious sort of tea, but Jim was in no mood to dispute the taxi-driver's terminology. "All right," he said.

"You can sit in the cab if you like," said the driver graciously and with his mouth full.

"Thank you," said Jim, his spirit broken by his sufferings.

So he sat in the cab for another fifteen minutes until the driver emerged and removing the glove from the flag donned it himself.

Jim gave the address of his flat and they moved off. As they approached their destination he re-

flected that his economical journey from Westminster Bridge to the region of Piccadilly had cost him between twelve and thirteen shillings and had taken him nearly two hours.

And this was how the poor lived!

II

Well, anyhow he had got through the afternoon somehow, he thought, as he ascended the stairs. He looked at his watch as he paused for a moment outside his own door and saw that it was half-past five; then he let himself in with his latchkey. He went straight through to his sitting-room and immediately noticed that it had been tidied up since his departure. Mrs. Pretty, he imagined; and for the first time wondered why she had avoided him all the morning. He suddenly felt that there was something unusual about the room. What was it now? He began looking round in an effort to define the difference which he had sensed, and then noticed that for one thing the window-curtains were looped back in an unaccustomed manner; the card-table, too, which generally stood open had been folded up and placed against the wall; the evening papers consequently had been laid on the piano, on the top of which it was a rule of his that nothing must ever be put. The thought of burglars flashed into his mind—of course, the flat had been empty all day. But then it didn't somehow seem in

keeping with this theory that everything should now be much neater than when he had gone out.

He was still looking round with a slight frown to observe whether some of his more valuable possessions were still in their places, when he heard a discreet cough behind him and spun round with a gasp.

Standing in the doorway was a middle-aged man of respectable appearance, neatly attired in dark grey trousers, black waistcoat and evening dress coat. In short the conventional costume of a man-servant. But who the dickens was he, and what was he doing here?

The stranger spoke.

"Mr. Grant, sir?" he said respectfully and in an interrogatory tone.

"That's me," replied Jim.

"Mr. Lush, sir," proceeded the stranger, "engaged me to-day, sir, and instructed me to take up my duties here this afternoon. I found the place a bit untidy, but I've done my best to clear it up, though I understood from Mr. Lush that there was a person who came in to do that generally. I hope you'll let me know, sir, if there's anything you want. Mr. Lush told me you would be dining out to-night, but shall I get you some tea now, sir?"

Jim felt an almost overpowering desire to take up the poker and determine by practical experiment whether this respectable-looking man was a living

being or a phantasm of his own disordered brain. But he looked solid enough; and supposing he was real it wouldn't do to poke him in the waistcoat at their first meeting. After last night Lush was capable of anything; though to clear out with five hundred pounds and within twenty-four hours provide a substitute to take his place, this really was something rather new. Meanwhile the substitute was waiting for an answer.

"N—no thanks," said Jim. "No tea. You might get me a clean glass though, and I'll help myself to a whisky and soda."

"Certainly, sir," said the substitute.

And he was just turning to leave the room, but Jim called after him.

"Oh—er—look here," he said, "do you mind telling me—er—what time did Mr. Lush engage you to-day?"

"About two o'clock, sir," said the man. "The gentleman in my last situation went abroad for good a few weeks ago, sir, and as it didn't suit me to go with him, I'd been taking a little holiday. I went in to-day to register at an office, and just as I was coming away your friend, Mr. Lush, came into the office asking for a butler-valet. Well, sir, as I happened to be there at the time we fixed everything up there and then—or at least not exactly there, because Mr. Lush made me drive with him in his car while he asked me a lot of questions and told me what sort of a place it was. Then at last, sir, he

told me to report here to-day and gave me a latch-key. I hope it's all right, sir ? "

" Oh yes, quite all right," said Jim. " Quite all right. I was only just wondering——" He left the sentence unfinished and after waiting a moment the man left the room.

So the eccentric Lush was driving round London in his own car now, was he ? Well, the money wouldn't last long at that rate. A fresh solution of the whole thing suggested itself to him. Lush had gone mad ! Suppressed shell-shock or something coming out at last. He couldn't help chuckling at the picture of his ex-valet descending like a whirlwind on the registry office and whisking this respectable-looking old fellow off in his motor. And yet there was method and consideration in that at least, and though Jim wasn't at all sure that he ought to keep this new man, he couldn't help being glad that there was some one to look after the flat while he remained there. Lush, clearly, whether mad or sane, did not intend to return.

He suddenly recalled another remark of the new man's. Why had Lush said that he would be dining out to-night ? He had never said so himself and what was more he hadn't meant to. He particularly intended to have a quiet evening at home.

At this moment the new servant returned with a clean tumbler and a fresh syphon on a tray and set them down before Jim.

"Oh, by the way," said Jim. "You didn't tell me your name."

"Chapman, sir," said he, who will hereinafter be referred to thereas.

"And excuse me, sir," he went on, "but Mr. Lush told me to tell you that he had paid me my first month's wages in advance. It's not unusual, sir, when taking up a place suddenly like this to oblige a gentleman."

Oh he had, had he?

Further consideration of this latest intelligence was interrupted at that moment. Jim's ear had caught the distant sound of an electric bell.

"I think some one's ringing at the front door," he said. "You might go and see."

"Yes, sir," said Chapman, and withdrew. Jim heard him cross the little hall and unlatch the front door; then his voice saying, "Good evening, sir. Yessir, he's just come in," to some one without.

The next moment the door of the sitting-room was flung open, and Chapman announced "Mr. Lush."

III

Lush shot past the new valet like a stone from a sling and was immediately in the centre of the room. He was obviously endeavouring, though without very great success, to keep in check the most overpowering excitement. His hair was slightly ruffled (who had ever before seen Lush with ruffled

hair ?) and his eyes shone. He was out of breath. Never had Jim felt so much at a loss how to address a visitor or what to say to him. But one doubt had already been cleared away from his mind. Lush was tremendously, magnificently excited and exhilarated, but he was not mad. Twice, three times he endeavoured to address Jim, but emotion and breathlessness were too much for him. Then at last the words came.

"I've done it, my boy; I've done it," he cried. "And I can do it again! I told you you wouldn't regret it."

"Done what?" said Jim. In spite of himself the contagion of Lush's frenzy was sweeping over him.

"Here!" said Lush hoarsely. His two hands dipped into the side-pockets of his coat and emerged again each grasping an amorphous and crumpled medley of bank-notes. "Yours," he said, extending his right hand. "Mine!" he added, flourishing his left hand in the air and then returning it to his pocket.

"Take it," he went on, as Jim stared in stupefaction at the outstretched handful. "It's yours. What did I say? Twenty-five per cent? Yes, but that's not counting my share." He tapped his pocket. "My first day out. Not bad! Not bad for a beginner, eh? Go on! Count it!" He let the notes dribble through his fingers on to the table while Jim gazed in astonishment at the sight.

"How on earth——" he began, but Lush interrupted him. "Not now," he said. "Tell you after dinner. You're dining with me. I'm staying at Claridge's, you know. By the way, what do you think of old Chapman?"

"He seems a very decent sort of——"

"You're quite right," burst in Lush again. "He knows his job. I went into it very thoroughly with him. Ha, ha! I wonder what he thought I was. My word, what a day I've had! Now, look here, Grant." He dived into another pocket and brought up a long envelope while Jim tried to recover his breath at being addressed in this manner. "Here's the agreement."

"What agreement?" asked Jim helplessly.

"Partnership. Settled it with my solicitors this afternoon. You'd better let yours see it too some time soon. Leave it with you to look over," and he flung the envelope down on the table on top of the bank-notes.

"Now then, what else was there?" he went on before Jim could say a word. "Oh yes, I know. Do you think you could send old Chapman out for half an hour or so, while I collect my things? Papers and so on, you know. I don't want him standing round while your City friend is rifling the servants' quarters. And then if you don't mind dining rather early, let's make it half-past seven. I'm most infernally hungry. We'll dine up in my sitting-room. To tell you the truth"—a charming

look of bashfulness appeared in his face at these words—"I've not got any proper clothes yet—haven't had time. But if you come round at about seven-thirty and ask for my room, they'll send you up. And now, if you wouldn't mind just ringing for Chapman, it would save me time. I've got one or two things to see to before dinner and my car's waiting downstairs. By the way," he added, extracting a smaller envelope from yet another pocket, "if you want a message for Chapman to go on, you might ask him to get this prescription made up. He could wait and bring it back. It's some jolly good stuff I invented for stopping your hair from coming out. You might find it handy to have in the house."

In a dream Jim rang the bell and asked Chapman to get the mixture made up at a neighbouring chemist's where he had an account. He couldn't help thinking that if the pace at which he was living didn't slow down soon he might find Lush's hair tonic developing into a necessity.

"Thanks very much," said Lush, as the front door was heard to slam behind the departing Chapman. "Now I'll just collect my things, and then I'll expect you round at half-past seven. Till then au revoir." And he shot out of the room again.

Still wondering whether he was awake or asleep, Jim crossed to the table and began automatically counting the heap of notes. They were in all denominations, from ten shillings upwards, and it

took him a little time to sort them. When he had done so, the result was as follows:—

Fifty-pound notes . .	5
Ten-pound notes . .	17
Five-pound notes . .	43
One-pound notes . .	84
Ten-shilling notes . .	62

In other words, there were two hundred and eleven notes in all with a total face value of seven hundred and fifty pounds, the exact sum which Lush had undertaken last night to produce within twenty-four hours as a guarantee of good faith. Well, somehow or other, in some extraordinary way, he had managed to do it. Jim could only hope that the police were not already after him, as he reflected that the appearance of the five little piles of notes on his table bore a strange resemblance to the newspaper descriptions of the loot found by the authorities in the coal-scuttle after a successful raid on a gambling-den.

But if Lush had won enough by lunch-time to have raised a motor-car, he must have discovered a gaming-house which kept very unusual hours. Moreover, there was something extraordinarily reassuring in the way that the undertaking given last night had been carried out to the exact sum named. The visit to the solicitor, too!

At this thought Jim took up the long envelope and extracted a document at the top of which his and Lush's names appeared in large gothic char-

acters. There followed an interminable rigmarole in which there was a great deal of "on the one part" and "on the other part," and the thing ended with the customary spaces for the signatures of principals and witnesses. It was, however, possible to gather from the general nature of the words which kept on recurring in it that it did, in fact, propose to establish a partnership between Lush and himself on an equal half-and-half basis. There were numerous clauses showing how profits were to be estimated, when settlements were to be made and so on. A further portion of the one endless sentence of which the thing consisted seemed to forbid either of the parties to enter into a similar agreement with any third party while the present agreement remained in force. The compact was to be for a preliminary twelve months, terminable thereafter by six months' notice on either side. The document, however, threw singularly little light on the purposes for which the two contracting parties were proposing to join forces; it merely noted that they intended to enter into an agreement "for the purpose of carrying on business together under the style and title of Grant and Lush."

Why not Lush and Grant, thought Jim as he let the document fall from his hand on to the table again, in which process it crackled impressively? His mind wandered off into consideration of the comparative euphony of the two titles, and proceeded vaguely to ponder over the difference that it might

brilliant purple plentifully adorned with yellow braid. Lush himself seemed to feel that some apology or explanation was required for this unusual garment, for he glanced down at it with a kind of sheepish pride, and said: "I saw this in a shop window in the City to-day. I hope you don't mind it; but the fact is that I've started all this so suddenly that for the moment I've been caught out in the matter of clothes. However, no one is going to worry about that upstairs here, and I thought this seemed the very coat for a self-made munitioneer, which is what I believe they all think I am. Besides my rude exterior fits in better with my having arrived without a man. I tried to get one to-day for myself when I got Chapman for you, but there wasn't one to be had whom I could walk off with as it were; and Chapman was too old to suit me.

"Now then, Grant," he went on, "I vote we have dinner."

He took up a desk telephone, told some one to let him have dinner at once, and turned again to Jim.

"I've ordered this dinner myself," he said, "and I flatter myself it's a pretty good one. I couldn't resist doing it though it's not quite in the part of the munition-maker. You see where I've got such a pull over the ordinary man in my class of life who suddenly tries to do this sort of thing is that I haven't the very slightest fear of the servants in this place. I've not been a servant myself ever since I left school

without knowing the proper way to talk to them. And they won't catch me out using the wrong knife and fork or saying " serviette," because you see I've waited on gentlemen quite as long as most of them have. All the same they can't quite make me out." He grinned, and withdrew the grin instantaneously as the waiter entered the room with the *hors-d'œuvres*.

It certainly was an extraordinarily good dinner; Jim doubted whether he could have ordered a better one himself. The wines had been chosen with equal skill, and each appeared at exactly the right moment. As Lush had foretold, he dealt with complete success with every problem which arose; neither gaping at the bird when it was presented to him before being carved, but giving a wonderful gesture of approval without interrupting his flow of conversation; nor again giving way to vocal expression of the surprise which is often caused to the inexperienced by the *bombe* of that name. Moreover, at the end of dinner he set the *clou* to his performance by refusing the waiter's offer of a cigar-cutter. All waiters offer this implement, but they all despise the man who makes use of it, and know that he doesn't smoke cigars at home.

No, the only real difficulty of which there seemed any possibility during dinner was in the matter of conversation. Naturally, during the coming and going of the waiter no business could be discussed, and it was not easy for either of them to find other

subjects in common which would not have involved the risk of revealing Lush's former connection with his guest. Fortunately they could both manage war-shop, and as Lush took an early opportunity of saying, when the waiter was in the room, that he had never regretted serving in the ranks, an awkwardness that might otherwise have arisen was swept away and the conversation was kept going successfully; so that the waiter eventually retired to report to his colleagues that the gent in the cricket blazer was rummier than they'd thought but he seemed a rare good sort for all that. Indeed on one occasion Lush, by one of his military reminiscences of a humorous nature, achieved the signal triumph of causing the waiter to leave the room suddenly in order to avoid choking.

At length after coffee and old brandy had been brought in, and the waiter had picked up the whole table and removed it from the room (Lush hadn't expected this but he noted the arrangement with approval), the two men were left to themselves.

Immediately Lush turned to business.

"Did you have a look at that agreement?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jim. "I glanced through it after you left."

"Any suggestions?" asked Lush.

"Well, it seems all right as far as I can see," said Jim. "I mean to say from what I know of agreements, which is little enough, it doesn't seem

to contain anything unreasonable; but look here, you know, what *is* this business? Of course, I can see that somehow or other you've done jolly well for yourself to-day, and after what you've done for me I've nothing to say if you choose to move straight from my rooms into a suite at Claridge's. After all that's your affair, and I've certainly got an extraordinarily good dinner out of it all. But, my dear Lush, do for Heaven's sake tell me what you have been up to all day, and where I come in, and how on earth you've managed it all and what on earth you're going to do next. I mean have you really found your level yet or will you be asking me to dinner at 10 Downing Street or Buckingham Palace to-morrow night?"

"Steady on!" said Lush. "One thing at a time. I don't want to hustle you, and I asked you here to-night purposely so that you could satisfy yourself in every particular before definitely signing the agreement, but I can't answer everything at once. Now then, what was the first point?"

"What I must know at once," said Jim, "if I am to preserve my sanity, is where you've been and what you've been doing since you left my flat early this morning. I heard from Chapman that you had been seen in a motor outside a registry office round about lunch-time, and I know that between five and six o'clock you arrived at my flat with your pockets bulging with bank-notes—but I want to know the rest. Where did you go,

and how did you do it? That's certainly the first question."

Lush laughed.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I'm so pleased with myself I couldn't bear not to tell you, but I'm glad you asked me all the same. It was a bit of a *tour de force*, and I'm bound to say that I'd never contemplated starting in this way; I'd meant to go a great deal more carefully at the beginning. But there you are—all's well that ends well, and I've certainly enjoyed my day."

He took a pull at his cigar and blew the smoke slowly out again before he resumed.

"Let me remind you," he continued, "what I'd let myself in for. I had undertaken in a moment of what I now see was extreme rashness, in order to convince you of the genuineness of my plans, to secure for you a fifty per cent clear profit on five hundred pounds within twenty-four hours, the time-limit terminating some time early to-morrow morning. For my own satisfaction and to minister to my own pride and conceit I had determined to hand the money over to you in actual cash, and to do so in the shortest time under the twenty-four hours that I could manage. When I left your flat, however, at four o'clock this morning, I was handicapped by two difficulties, both of which arose directly from the existence of this time-limit that I had set myself. In order to achieve the result that I was after as quickly as possible it was of course

necessary to get to work at once, but I think you will agree that there are very few reputable ways open to a man of making money at four o'clock in the morning. Moreover, I could not touch half my capital until the banks opened at nine o'clock and I could draw out my own five hundred pounds. So that for the first five hours of my working-day my difficulties were exactly doubled.

"As I turned into Piccadilly I could not help realising that none of my ready-made schemes for money-making provided for such unusual conditions as those which I had now gratuitously forced on myself in my wish to prove to you at once that I could be as good as my word.

"At this moment, as I was standing at the corner of the street debating which way to turn, I saw a market-cart crawling slowly along the road, the driver as usual asleep on a kind of shelf which projected over the back of the horse. This gave me an idea. I would go to Covent Garden market, where at any rate there would shortly be business of some sort going on; I had no fixed plan in my head as I walked along the empty streets, but I intended to keep my eyes open for any opportunity that might arise.

"When I arrived at my destination, I found that one small district of London at any rate was hard at work already. The streets were packed with carts and ankle-deep in vegetable refuse. Porters with enormous piles of boxes and baskets on their

heads were dashing about among these obstacles, and everywhere there was a sense of eager, hurrying activity. All the same for the moment, even in the middle of this hurly-burly, it was rather difficult for a newcomer to find his way to any actual centre at which the real business of the morning was being conducted. As I was threading my way along, however, a more than usually large porter with a more than usually high pile of baskets on his head appeared opposite me at the other end of a narrow space left between the backs of a row of carts and the front of a row of shops. To avoid turning back I stepped aside into an open doorway, and as I did so I noticed a hand painted on the wall pointing up the stairs and beneath it the words 'Sale Room.' This was good enough for me, and I accordingly mounted the stairs, and at the top of the first flight found myself in a large room in which a kind of auction seemed to be going on.

"I have still no very clear idea into what section of the market I had penetrated, but one thing struck me almost immediately as I stood and watched the proceedings, and that was that no serious counter-bidding was going on. Various men present made bids in turn as different lots came up, but in each case the auctioneer knocked the lot down without more than a pretence of waiting for further offers. 'We have here,' I said to myself, 'a ring of buyers working in co-operation. This is not my idea of how an auction should be con-

ducted. I shall accordingly endeavour to obtain pleasure and profit by rattling the market a bit and seeing how the ring like it.'

"As soon, therefore, as the next lot came up and a bid had been made, I raised it. Immediately every one in the room turned to look at me. I suppose the idea did not occur to them that anyone could be in that room at that time of the day unless he were in the business, but, on the other hand, they were a bit puzzled and distrustful at the interruption of a procedure which obviously suited them all very well.

"I was outbid at once, and the lot was knocked down to some one else; but from this time onwards I sent up the bidding on every lot—taking the prices a little higher each time, but always letting the lots fall finally to one of the ring. I could see that they were getting more and more annoyed. Clearly they had formed some sort of combination for eliminating competition at this stage in order that they might get a bigger profit on their sales to the next man, and my boosting of the prices was making their profit less and less every minute. Presently I saw some of them whispering together, and a slip of paper was passed up to the auctioneer; a new plan of compaign was being evolved. I could guess what it would probably be, but I kept cool. Shortly after this, just as a lot was being put up, I was conscious that a kind of nudging and quiet signalling was going on among the members of the ring. I adopted

my usual procedure, and bidding was much freer than usual this time. The price went up and up, and then suddenly the others all dropped out and I was left high and dry, the owner of a quantity (I'm not sure that I ever knew how much) of, I think, pineapples at a hundred and twenty-five pounds. The ring looked at me with a kind of inquisitive satisfaction, and the auctioneer turned and spoke to me.

" ' What name ? ' he asked.

" ' Lush,' I said.

" ' I'm afraid as the name is a new one I must ask you to deposit the sum at which this parcel has just been knocked down to you, sir,' he said. ' It is the custom here.'

" There was a hush of expectancy. The ring, I imagined, thought that I had been sent in by some private enemy or rival of one or more of the members to force up prices against them, and that in arranging to retire all together like this without warning they would show me up, as my backer would not have provided me with any quantity of cash. In this case I should have had to give up bidding and the pineapples would be put up again.

" To their disgust, however, I marched up to the auctioneer's desk. ' Certainly,' I said. ' Quite right. Just count it, will you; and let me have a receipt ? ' And I planked down a hundred and twenty-five pounds in notes before him.

" The others saw that their plan had failed. I had called their bluff.

"From now onwards, though I admit I was a little anxious, I really had the game in my hands. The ring couldn't afford to let a stranger go off with lot after lot, but, on the other hand, if he stayed in the room and kept on sending the prices up, they would lose all the profit which their co-operative arrangement had secured them. I think it must have been a pretty big profit too, as you will see. At any rate for the moment I went back to my former game of sending up the bidding, but dropping off with a cautious shake of the head when I judged by the manner of the others that the figure was getting near the limit which would leave them a margin of profit.

"There was more whispering and consultation among the other buyers, and finally one of them stepped quietly across to me.

"'I don't know whom you're acting for,' he said in a low voice, 'but I know you're not acting for yourself or I'd have seen your face about before. Now, look here: we admit you've carried out your instructions well, but this game of your employer's doesn't suit us. I don't know what you're making out of it yourself, but here's an offer from our side. We'll give you twenty-five pounds to get out of this place, and stay out.'

"'Nothing doing,' I said. 'And five,' I called out to the auctioneer.

"The man who had been speaking to me looked pretty sick, and so if it comes to that did the auc-

tioneer. He'd been squared somehow, and anything unusual like me made him nervous that the market authorities would get after him, I expect. Anyhow, from the look of things all round I guessed I could squeeze somebody there for more than twenty-five pounds.

"In a few minutes the man who had just spoken to me was back again.

"'Look here,' he said 'no one's going to let on what you did here, so you're quite safe. Now I expect you're been pretty well paid for this job. Well, we'll allow you've done it well, but it's got to stop, and the boys here will go up to fifty quid if you'll chuck it now.'

"'How do you know I wouldn't come back?' I asked.

"'Oh you won't come back,' he said. 'We'll take care of that.' And I pictured a particularly burly porter being furnished with a description of me and sitting on those stairs waiting for the next six months or so. I don't know if this was their plan; but they needn't worry. I'm not going back there."

Lush leant back in his chair and grinned.

"Well, what happened then?" asked Jim.

"I turned to this chap who'd come over as ambassador, and I said: 'I won't take a bribe from you or anyone, but I'll tell you what I will do. I'll sell you my lot of fruit for two hundred pounds and clear out for good. That's my last word.'

"I thought he'd haggle, but I must have tumbled on the very lair of the profiteers, for he hardly paused.

"'Right,' he said. 'You've played your game fine, but you can go back and tell whoever sent you that we're not going to be caught again.'

"'I won't forget,' said I, 'and I want cash down.' And this rather seedy-looking broker, or whatever he was, put his hand in his pocket, pulled out four fifty-pound notes and handed them to me in exchange for my auctioneer's receipt. I can tell you there ought to be an enquiry into the prices paid for some of these luxury fruits.

"'Now get out,' he said.

"'Right,' I said, and I ran down the stairs and out into the street. It wasn't nearly seven o'clock yet, but I'd cleared seventy-five pounds already, or thirty per cent of the minimum that I'd undertaken to get. Have another cigar."

"Thanks very much," said Jim. "I think I will. Well, what did you do next?"

"The next two episodes were minor incidents in my campaign, but as I cleared another fifteen pounds over them and as they showed me that my luck was in and so encouraged me to take the big risk that I took later on, I will tell you about them. I want you to realise, however, that financial scoops thought out on the spur of the moment long before business hours and scoops that have to bring in an immediate cash return do not form part of my real

schemes for our work together. I prefer naturally to lay my plans in advance, and can count on far bigger and safer returns if I do not expect to see my money back in my pocket again in a few minutes. To-day, however, I had to crowd the conception and execution of each plan into as short a space of time as possible, knowing that if I succeeded I should get both the time and the opportunity to put my real ideas to the test later on.

"As I left the market I turned into Floral Street, and stopped for a moment, as I noticed that the big doors through which the scenery is taken in and out of the Opera House were open, and I had a glimpse of activity and heard a sound of hammering from within. I passed on again wondering what opera was being given to-night for which such very early preparation was necessary. I had just stopped to look at a playbill, when a woman carrying a camp-stool rushed up to me.

"'I must be first,' she said to me, panting as she spoke.

"I didn't catch on for a moment, and I suppose I looked a bit surprised. The woman, however, didn't notice this, but as soon as she could get her breath again she went on: 'I've been first here for every new production for the last fifteen years, and I'd have beaten you to-day, only I waited too long for my friend.' I understood then, and looking round realised that I had unconsciously taken up my position at the head of the gallery queue, or rather

at the place where the head of the queue would be later on in the day.

"'It can't make any difference to you,' said the woman. 'You'll see exactly as well inside, only do please let me have your place, or it will break my record.'

"'Well,' I thought to myself, 'this is a pretty harmless sort of lunacy, but I'm very much afraid that my motto for to-day has got to be 'nothing for nothing.'

"I looked at her and could see that she was well-dressed and obviously comfortably off. Clearly she had no need to wait all day in a queue, but could easily have booked a stall if she'd wanted to, and equally clearly there could be no difference once she got inside the gallery whether she had been first or second outside. But I suppose that old girl's one excitement for years had been to be the first through the gallery door whenever a new opera was put on. There are people like that; and in about another ten years there'll be a photograph of her in the early edition of some evening paper and she'll feel that her life has not been lived in vain.

"'I'm sorry,' I said, 'but I'm afraid I got here first.' The rest was easy. I had no mercy on her and there was no reason why I should have. I beat her up to five pounds before I changed places with her, and just as I had done so her friend who had been late turned up. She was exactly the same type as the first old thing, and she arrived in a rare old

about London, but I must say you beat me easily.'

"'Yes, my boy,' he said, beaming, 'that's because you're a Londoner yourself. There isn't one of you knows his own city.'

"'Well,' I said, 'I don't know that I'm as bad as all that. I expect anyhow I could stump you if I tried.'

"'I bet you couldn't,' he said.

"'Well,' said I, 'I bet you five bob you can't tell me which is further north—St. George's Hospital or Waterloo Station.'

"'What do you take me for?' he said. 'Ask me something difficult. Five shillings, indeed! Why, it's robbery.'

"'Well make it five pounds then,' I said. "And anyway tell me, which *is* further north?'

"'I take you,' he shouted, 'you poor boob. St. George's Hospital, of course.'

"'Wrong,' I said. 'Hand it over.'

"'Wrong nothing,' he said. 'Come back to my hotel and I'll show you.'

"'All right,' I said. 'But don't forget it's pounds, not shillings.'

"I wasn't surprised to find that he was living in an hotel off the Strand. Such places are full of his type. There was a map in the hall, and we got a walking-stick out of the rack to measure with. It was all over in a minute.

"'Can you beat it?' he said. 'I couldn't have

believed it. It's worth the money, though. See here, my boy, you must stop on to breakfast with me and tell me some more of these.'

"I didn't particularly want to waste any more time with the old fellow, but I was infernally hungry by now, and the day being what it was I recognised that it would reduce my overhead charges if I got a free meal, so I accepted. And I never did a cleverer thing in my life."

V

"We went into the dining-room of the little hotel," resumed Lush, after a moment's thoughtful pause, "and sat down opposite each other at a little table for two. My new acquaintance had been given a bundle of letters by the clerk in the hall as we came in, but he had stuffed them straight in his pocket, so that although I have very good eyesight and am very quick at reading words held at any angle, I hadn't managed to get his name yet. He didn't volunteer it either and he never asked for mine, but in spite of this we kept the conversation going pretty brightly during breakfast. I'd got that little bit of information of mine about Hyde Park Corner and Waterloo from a map and not from any guide-book, and from the same source I gave him several other good posers about London streets, while he in turn thoroughly enjoyed himself turning

on his historical tap, and all the while I was tucking into eggs and bacon and marmalade and toast.

" Just as we were getting towards the end of the meal a boy brought in a telegram on a tray and handed it to my American. He opened it at once and read it, while I politely looked away. The next moment, however, the boy was back again.

" ' You're wanted on the telephone, sir,' he said.

" ' Excuse me just a minute,' said my friend, and jumping up from his seat he followed the boy out of the room. As he disappeared I noticed that he had left the telegram open on his plate.

" Now as I've told you, I don't have to look at a thing twice to read it whether it's the right way up or not, and it took me just as long to take in the message on this telegram as it did to see that it was lying there. The next instant my host had dashed into the room again.

" ' I'd nearly forgotten this,' he said, snatching up the telegram and rushing off again. ' I won't be a minute,' he called over his shoulder, as he tore off again to the telephone.

" ' H'm,' thought I, ' that message is more important than it looks or he wouldn't have bothered to keep his caller waiting on the line while he came back and fetched it.' And yet all the message had said was :

' MARRIED. INFORM PA NOON TO-MORROW. SHENLEY.'

" The telegram was addressed ' Peterson, Knagg's Hotel, W.C. 2.' and in the instant that I had seen it

I had read the name of the place at which it had been handed in as 'St. Cretia.' I didn't recognise the name, though as far as I knew it might be a real place. There are a lot of odd saints' names about in Cornwall, for instance.

"I dare say if my new acquaintance had come back to the table there and then I should have thought no more of the message. But he didn't. It was about a quarter to nine now; I had quite finished my breakfast and was impatient to get going again, but I didn't quite like to slip away without thanking my host for his hospitality, quite apart from the fact that he had not yet paid me his bet. So I sat on, growing more and more impatient.

"As I sat staring at the table-cloth, my mind turning over and over what my next move should be, a rather curious thing happened. I don't know whether what I'm going to describe is a common trick of memory or of eyesight, but I know that it has frequently happened in my own case, possibly partly as the result of the system of memory training which I taught myself in France. Everything that I read with any sort of attention imprints itself on my brain in such a way that if I afterwards wish to recall it I do not have to go through the mental process of piecing my recollections together and so gradually forcing my brain to give me the information which it has locked away, but I visualize the page or pages of print from which I first acquired the

particular piece of knowledge that I'm after, and as it were re-read it there.

"To make it a little clearer, supposing you asked me the date of the battle of Austerlitz, and that for the moment I couldn't remember it. I should not go through the process of saying to myself 'let me see, Austerlitz was after such and such an event and before such and such another one. So and so was going on about the same time; therefore it must have been about 1805.' Nor should I say over to myself the dates of all the battles which Napoleon fought, or any other helpful list of dates which I had driven into my head by any system of mnemonics—though the latter mental process is by no means uncommon with the victims of an ordinary education. As I say, I should think in neither of these two ways, but I should visualize the page or pages of the 'History of the World' which I took in during 1916 which dealt with the battle of Austerlitz; I should read the date off the top of the page and tell it to you within two seconds. Of course I have chosen a rather obvious example, but I expect you will understand what I mean."

"I understand all right," said Jim, "though I don't see how the dickens you do it."

"Nor do I," said Lush, "but it's the way my brain works. Well, as I was going to say, sometimes when I am tired or strained and am not using my eyes for looking at any very definite object

(you know how one can sit and think without really looking at anything), I suddenly see something that I have read, it may be five minutes, it may be years ago, as distinctly as if the printed page were actually before me. I can read every comma and see every flaw in the type on these occasions, but, as I say, this only happens, fortunately, when I am not quite normal; otherwise of course my memory would be constantly confused and I should lose the benefit of all the training I've given it.

"I naturally was a little tired and excited after my early start and my unusual experiences this morning, and as I sat at that table in the hotel dining-room, with my mind really on quite other matters, I suddenly saw that telegram lying open before me again. It wasn't there really, of course; I had only visualized it; but the curious thing was that when I read it this second time I saw a word that I had not noticed when the telegram was really there in the flesh, so to speak. I must of course have really taken in the missing word the first time or otherwise I could not have seen it now, but the process had been a subconscious one. The word had reached the retina the first time, but not the brain, I suppose. But when I visualized the message five or ten minutes afterwards, I got the whole thing.

"I wouldn't bother you with all this jaw about the workings of the mind, if the discovery of the missing word had not had such extraordinary

results. It's getting late, though, so I must be as quick as I can.

"Well, the word I now saw was the word 'Radio' at the top of the form, and this addition threw an entirely fresh light on the whole message. As you are aware, this word is commonly used to head telegrams which have been transmitted by wireless telegraphy, and this particular telegram had therefore practically certainly originated on a ship at sea. In that case the word that I had taken for St. Cretia must be the name of the vessel—I had it; the 'Cretic,' and what I had read as 'St.' was really 'S.S.' Another thought instantly arose. The first word of the text of the message had been 'MARRIED.' Well, people don't get married on White Star liners—I know the captain can do this if necessary, but it is so unusual that the possibility can really be disregarded—and even if it were a runaway match or something of that sort, it would surely have been simpler to have telegraphed from the port of departure than to wait until the ship was at sea. I made a mental note that I would find out at the first convenient opportunity on what day the 'Cretic' had sailed. Then the rest of the message, 'INFORM PA NOON TO-MORROW.'. Well, why not inform Pa at once; he couldn't stop the wedding or get at the newly-married couple now. There was something a little odd about these words as well to my mind. It seemed to me that one might write colloquially 'Tell Pa,' or more formally 'Inform

Father,' but 'Inform Pa' seemed wrong. Not much in itself, but it added a little to the unusual nature of the telegram.

"I had got so far in my thoughts, when my American host, whose name I now assumed to be Peterson, came back quickly into the room. He was fumbling with a note-case as he came towards me.

"'I'm very sorry,' he said, 'but I've had a message that means I must go off down to the City at once. I must apologize for leaving you like this, but I hope you'll forgive me. Before you go, however, I must pay you my debt. I hope we may meet again. Drop me a line here any time.'

"As he spoke he handed me a five-pound note. It did not seem to occur to him that although he had suggested my writing to him, he had not told me his name. Altogether he gave the appearance of a man whom something, presumably in this case the message to which he referred, had considerably flustered.

"Of course I said I was just meaning to leave anyhow, and it didn't matter in the least, and I thanked him very much for my breakfast and for paying up so promptly, and I ended by repeating that I also hoped we might meet again soon.

"He hardly waited for me to get through with my remarks, but was back again at the door waiting to show me out while I was still speaking. So we shook hands, and I left at once. I wasn't sorry to

get away either, as I knew I'd got a busy day before me.

"As I went down the steps of the hotel, I wondered whether the message of which Mr. Peterson had spoken had been contained in the telegram that I had seen or in the telephone message that I hadn't heard. In any case, thought I, I'm very near the White Star office, and I'm going to have a look at the passenger list. After all, it's on the way to my bank. I reached Oceanic House in a very few minutes and as it was still very early there were very few people there. I asked to see the 'Cretic's' passenger list, thinking that I might have to invent some excuse or other for my request, but they were quite obliging and handed me a printed copy at once.

"'Let me have it back, though,' said the man behind the counter. 'We've very few left.'

"I took the list to a leather seat and turned at once to the letter 'S.' I must admit that I was surprised not to see the name 'Shenley' among the first or second class passengers. I didn't worry about the steerage. If the idea that had been growing in my mind had anything in it, there was no point in looking there. I looked all through the S's in the hope that the name had been mangled in transmission, but it was not there. I turned to the cover of the list to see when the 'Cretic' had sailed, and I saw that she had left three days ago. Surely no one would wait until they were in the middle of

the Atlantic before telegraphing to a third party to ask him to inform Pa that he or she was married.

" Anyhow, if I couldn't find the name I was looking for, I had reached a blind alley and might as well hurry on to my bank. I rose from my seat to return the list to the clerk, and as I did so somehow or other it slipped from my hand to the floor. As it fell it opened, and in stooping to pick it up my eye fastened on one word on the open page. You know how the eye can pick out a particular word from a whole page of print when it has been ordered by the brain to search for it ? Well, my sight had served me well for the second time this morning, for under the letter P in the first class passenger list I saw the name ' Shanley Perrin.'

" You will say that I had very little grounds for assuming that this Shanley Perrin was the same as the Shenley whose telegram I had seen half an hour before. But you see this wasn't all that the list showed me, for immediately below this name, though crossed through with an ink line, was the name ' J. F. Peterson.'

" Of course I didn't know that the initials of my host at breakfast were ' J. F.' ; and equally I couldn't be sure that I wasn't wasting time, which on this day of days was more than ever money, in playing the amateur detective at Oceanic House. On the other hand, some sixth sense told me to go on, to follow the thing through. It was the same driving-power that had made me go up the stairs

"I reviewed the situation again, and was able to add to my previous summary the following:

'Messrs. Perrin and Bull—the presidents of two big American harvester manufacturing firms—are on the same boat in the middle of the Atlantic. Mr. Bull owes his place on the boat to the fact that at the last minute Mr. Perrin's London representative arranged not to travel. It may not be going too far, therefore, to say that this representative gave up his reservation to Bull at Perrin's request. Three days after the boat had sailed, Perrin, a rich old married man, sends a wireless to his London representative saying that he is married and asking him to inform Pa at noon to-morrow, which I take to mean to-day. I may also make a guess that as Perrin and Peterson are on such terms that the wireless is signed "Shanley" and not "Perrin," Peterson was so far in his chief's confidence that he knew the purpose of his wishing to travel together with Bull. Knowing this, a word or so would probably be enough to tell him whether this purpose has been achieved or not.'

"Having got so far by guess-work, and though I admit that there wasn't a single stage that hadn't as many holes in it as a sieve, still you must confess that there was no fact in my possession that made my assumptions impossible, I next borrowed from the bank's collection of reference books a directory which gave me a brief description of the share

capital and general constitution of the two firms of which Perrin and Bull were the presidents. By comparing these particulars with those given for other harvester makers I saw that these two were far and away the biggest. In capital and output there seemed very little to choose between them.

"An examination of the Stock Exchange quotations for the shares of these two concerns taken at odd dates over the last six months, which I was also able to make with the assistance of the bank's file, showed me that both had been steady the whole time at about the same figure; and a surprisingly low one it was, considering the importance of the two firms. The only explanation to my mind was that the two of them had been engaged for some time in price-cutting, each hoping to force the other out of business—with disastrous results so far for the shareholders on both sides.

"Would it be too much, I thought, to assume that the purpose which caused an eleventh-hour change to be made in the 'Cretic's' passenger list, so that Mr. Bull might accompany Mr. Perrin, was the hope in the mind of one or both of these gentlemen that an armistice might be arranged before both corporations were ruined?

"Having reached this point a light seemed suddenly to break over me. I suddenly saw, or thought I saw, what the whole telegram had meant. The two presidents after three days' discussion had agreed to an amalgamation. Perrin had immedi-

ately telegraphed to his London man the word 'Married.' Yes, it was good enough; the two would now be one. And the rest of the message? 'Inform Pa noon to-morrow.' I'd got it. Pa was P.A., and P.A. was the Press Association. Of course even presidents of American corporations can't settle a thing like this by their two selves, but an agreement to recommend amalgamation must have been reached, and old Perrin had wired, or I should say wirelessed, his London agent at once, knowing that if the news had been in the papers two or three days by the time the 'Cretic' passed Sandy Hook, there would be very little possibility of Bull backing out. His stockholders would lynch him if he tried.

"A fresh thought struck me. Was the news of this amalgamation already known on Wall Street? Had Perrin sent an earlier message to New York, and if so would it have been cabled over to London before the Press Association got out the announcement on this side? What encouraged me to believe that this had not been done was the mention of the hour, 'noon,' in Perrin's marconigram. It somehow gave me the impression that he was endeavouring to synchronise the announcement in the two continents. I only hoped he was.

"Well, it was a gamble—the whole thing was a gamble; I might be wrong from beginning to end, but I was going through with it. I could put my hands on nearly eleven hundred pounds in cash, and if I found that Industrial Harvesters and Perrin

and Hymacks opened steady I would buy both up to the limit of my money. If I'd guessed right, the news should come through to the House on the tape before half-past twelve, and if the shares didn't begin to rise pretty soon after that, well, I should be surprised. If I'd guessed wrong and no message came through, I could probably sell again without ruining either of us, although in that case I should have pretty well dished my chances of clearing the profit that I'd promised you in the twenty-four hours, and I must say I didn't much like the thought of that.

"Anyhow, at this point I paid the five hundred and ninety pounds which I had in my pocket into my account and then asked for an interview with the manager. He was disengaged, and I saw him at once. A private customer or client, or whatever you call it, of a bank who has a credit balance in his current account of nearly eleven hundred pounds, isn't as common as you might think in these days of big Government loans, and I wasn't a bit afraid of the manager.

"I must say, however, that he was a very decent fellow, and though I hadn't shaved yet he was more than ready to do what I asked. I told him that I wanted him to get his brokers to buy all the Industrial Harvesters and P. and H. shares that they could get, up to a limit of a thousand and ninety pounds, provided that both of them opened steady. They were to endeavour to sell again at the last

moment before the banks closed whatever the price was. The manager agreed to advance me up to ninety per cent of the money thus realised before his branch closed the same afternoon. He also undertook to arrange with his brokers that if I looked in at their office they should keep me informed during the day how my stocks were doing. We then completed the necessary formalities and I left. It was now about half-past ten and I had less than a sovereign's worth of loose change left, which was what I had in my pocket before you came back to the flat last night.

"The first thing I did after this was to go and get a shave. I felt fresher again after this, but there was no point in my going along to the City just yet, so I put in an hour in the National Gallery. I think some day, Grant, you and I must dabble a bit in picture dealing. You will introduce me to some of your impoverished aristocratic friends with family portraits to sell, and I'll bet you we can give them a better price than Agnew's and still clear something over the deal. I'm bound to say that the artistic side of pictures doesn't appeal to me very much, but I like to go round a first-class show like the National Gallery and price some of the goods. I'm not so bad at it as you might think.

"Well, about a quarter to twelve I got on a bus and went down to the City. I had a note of introduction from my bank manager to the brokers, and they seemed quite polite and pleased to see me.

They'd got me quite a parcel of the shares that I was after already. The prices of both had risen a point or two since the opening of the House, as they'd had to bid for the stock and couldn't just wait and take it as it turned up. I hung about the brokers' office for a bit and a little later was told that they had succeeded in buying up to the limit of my deposit with the bank.

"This was the one part of the day that I shouldn't care to go through again. I hope and trust that in a very short time you and I will be dealing in far larger sums than my stake of this morning, but it seemed to me that the result of to-day's work must be a kind of augury of future success or failure, and of course I knew that the immediate realisation or the indefinite postponement of all my plans hung on what happened during the next hour or two.

"While I was in the brokers' office they lent me a copy of the 'Times' to read, and I took the address of some City solicitors from an advertisement in it of a new capital issue. I went across to their office and made an appointment to come back again and see them in the afternoon. Then I returned to the brokers'. It was about twenty-five minutes to one now, and this was really the worst moment of all. I stood outside their door for quite five minutes before I had the courage to enter, but at last I took a deep breath and dashed into the office. The man, I don't know whether he was a clerk or what he was,

who had seemed to be dealing with my business before, was standing by the tape-machine reading a slip of paper as it came jerking out. As he caught sight of me, he called out, 'Well, who put you on to this, old man?' and I guessed from the 'old man' that my stocks had begun to move and in the right direction.

"'Oh, I just had a kind of hunch,' I said. 'How are they going?'

"'Industrials have risen twelve points and Perrin and Hymacks fourteen and a half since you bought,' he said. 'There's a report of an amalgamation or something come in apparently.'

"I wasn't going to give away how I felt over this news, but I don't mind telling you, Grant, that I was nearer tears with the excitement of that moment than I've been since I don't know when. However, all I said was, 'Good! Well, I must be getting along.' And I got along. You see there was nothing for me to wait for now. I knew I'd guessed right and I knew the stocks would go on rising. I'd made sure that the brokers had got my instructions properly, and all I had to do now was to return to the bank before it shut and pocket the proceeds.

"I went into a public telephone box and rang up a garage and told them to send a car to meet me outside Simpson's at a quarter to two. I gave your name as a reference—I hope you don't mind?"

"Not a bit," said Jim. "If it's worth anything, I seem to owe it to you."

"You see I could only be extravagant on tick at the moment. I couldn't even go to lunch at the Savoy. However, I went off to Simpson's on a bus and had a jolly good lunch for five or six bob. I tried to ring you up there to tell you how I was getting on, but there was no answer."

"I was out," said Jim.

"I thought you probably were," replied Lush, "and that was what put it into my head to try and get a new servant for you. I didn't like the thought of there being no one to answer the telephone. My car had turned up by now, and I went straight off to a good registry office that I knew, and by great luck caught old Chapman on the spot. I hadn't much time, so I took him along in the car with me while I explained his duties to him. I kept him waiting while I went into the bank because I hadn't quite finished telling him about your evening studs.

"I asked for the manager again, and again was shown straight in. Even he looked a bit excited.

"'Well, Mr. Lush,' he said, 'you mustn't think you can do this sort of thing on the Stock Exchange every day, you know. I don't know where you got your information from, but there's a full report of the terms on which these two concerns have agreed to amalgamate in the paper here.' He touched an evening paper on his desk. 'And it's come as a pretty big surprise. The stocks were still going up when

brand new trunks that have obviously just been bought and have probably not been paid for. I had very little luggage of my own, and what I had was shut up in your flat, and I'd no time then to go and pack it. If, however, after I'd booked a room at my hotel a number of parcels began to arrive for me with the labels of well-known West-end shops on them, it would create almost as good an impression as half a ton of the most respectably ancient luggage. I chose underclothing partly because I've always had a weakness for it, and partly because I know that nothing impresses the average servant in hotels or private houses more than a great quantity of expensive underclothes.

"So I got a good deal and had it sent on to Claridge's. I drove there myself, and they told me that they'd nothing but a suite left. I paid a week's rent down on the spot, and said I'd be coming in the same evening. Then I drove back to the City. In Cheapside I noticed this smoking-coat in a shop window, and I stopped the car and got out and bought it."

"I don't like it very much," said Jim.

"I think it's vile," said Lush, "but it has established my reputation here as an eccentric millionaire at a very trifling expense, and I shan't be wearing it for long."

"Well, I expect you know best," said Jim, "but it looks more like a cinema actor to me."

"Of course, I know best," said Lush, quite undis-

turbed by this criticism. "Well, as I was saying," he went on, "I took the car on to these solicitors. They kept me waiting a bit when I got there, confound them, but I spent the time in jotting down some notes of the agreement between us which I wanted them to look over and approve. They had shut me in a little sort of waiting-room. It had no proper windows of its own, but the upper part of three of the walls was formed of glass panels, so that a certain amount of light reached the den in which I had been put. I'm telling you all this because of a rather odd thing that happened while I was waiting there. I was sitting on a very uncomfortable little chair noting down some of the points that I wanted incorporated in our agreement, when I became aware that I could hear voices somewhere quite close. I have very little practical experience of solicitors' offices, but I had certainly always been under the impression up till this moment that one of the most elementary necessities in their construction was a number of completely soundproof compartments, so that I was more than a little surprised to hear these voices. I looked round everywhere to try and trace the sound, and finally looking up saw that one of the glass panels at the top of the little waiting-room had been shattered. Further examination showed that the damage had been very recently done, as there were still some traces of powdered glass on the floor beneath it; while the presence of a long pole with a brass knob

on the end of it in the corner of the room and the fact that the pane of glass next to and at right angles to the broken one formed a movable ventilator opening into the passage outside, suggested that the accident had been caused by some one's careless attempt to open or close this ventilator.

"It is probable that the order had already been given to repair the damage, but, however this may be, for the time being anything spoken in the adjoining room could be more or less plainly heard. The waiting-room being a room in which, I suppose, no one ever spoke, the complementary discovery had presumably not been made on the other side of the partition.

"I forget whether I have mentioned to you that my hearing is particularly acute. It has always been good, but I have improved it considerably by training during the last few years, and I could have heard practically every word that was being said in the next room if I had wanted to. But, as I say, I was busy with a pencil and paper myself and my thoughts were concentrated on the job I was on. You know, however, how a familiar name spoken in an ordinary tone of voice by people conversing at some distance can attract one's attention in an instant. Well, this was what happened to me. My attention was suddenly whisked through that hole in the glass panel by hearing one of the voices in the next room pronounce your name."

"Mine?" said Jim, astonished.

"Yes, yours. Although it was the name 'Grant' that had suddenly made me prick up my ears, of course it never occurred to me at first that it was you that was being discussed. But just as I was deciding that it was only a coincidence, and was on the point of returning to my notes, I heard another name mentioned which told me at once which 'Grant' it was that was the subject of the conversation. This second name was 'Pooley.'"

"Excuse my interrupting," said Jim, "but were these solicitors by any chance called Puxley, Sons and Bimberton?"

"No; Bridger and Bridger," said Lush. "Why?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Jim, a puzzled expression in his face. "Go on."

"Well," continued Lush, "as you can imagine, I listened pretty closely after this. And though after the incident of the telegram in the morning I'm afraid you'll think I'm too much of a peeping and eaves-dropping Tom, I must assure you that I never go out of my way ordinarily to cultivate either of these habits. I'm generally much too much interested in my own ideas to bother about what strangers are saying or looking at, but to-day, as it happened, on two ocasions my very acute senses of hearing and sight were the means of raising an interest to which I let myself yield. After all very few people in my position would have climbed on to the top of a cupboard in the waiting-room and put their heads through the broken pane and said:

'Excuse me, but I can hear what you're saying. Will you please find somewhere else for me to wait.'"

"There's no need to defend yourself as far as I am concerned," said Jim. "And if I may refer for a moment to the past, I don't mind saying that I've never had a servant or a batman or a scout who disturbed my letters less than you did."

"Thank you," said Lush, and nearly added, "sir," but just stopped himself in time.

"Well, to go on with what I was saying," he continued, "neither your name nor your uncle's was mentioned again, but having heard them both I had to listen to what followed.

"The voices in the next room seemed to come from two people, both men, and as far as I could judge both gentlemen. I gathered as the conversation went on that they were partners or principals, or whatever you call it in the business.

"The first voice was saying, 'He wants an advertisement put in the papers, but I'm not sure that it's a wise thing altogether.'

"'But what's the beginning of the story?' said voice number two.

"'The man went abroad seven or eight years ago,' said number one, 'to somewhere in South Africa. He had a kind of breakdown, I believe. Well, the arrangement was, that he should be paid the royalties for the use of the process during his lifetime. It's an unusual arrangement, I agree,

but apparently he had no relations and wasn't married, and I suppose it suited old Thingumbob as well as making it for a term of years. It was the kind of gamble he rather liked.

"'Well, he's gone on paying him so much for every ton of Potash turned out ever since. The money has been sent out to South Africa and the receipts have come in regularly. Then, you see, this letter comes, anonymous of course, from Pretoria or wherever it was. The writer says that Brooks came out there all right at the time he is supposed to have done; that he very shortly became known as a pretty heavy drinker and general rotter; that about eighteen months after his arrival he transferred his rights in the process to a Dutch publican, or whatever they're called out there, in payment of enormous gambling debts that he'd run up. I suppose he could do this if he wanted to, and the royalties would still have to be paid during Brooks' lifetime. The publican, however, wasn't taking any risks, and he went on acknowledging the money as it arrived in Brooks' name and with what looked like Brooks' signature.

"'The writer of the anonymous letter had, I suppose, at one time been in the Dutchman's confidence and then had a row with him; anyhow, he wrote the whole story home to London. Well, they've had it looked into out there, and it's true enough. The transfer is all O.K., no legal holes in that, but there's no Brooks to be found. If it

VII

"Yes," Lush was saying a few minutes later, "I knew I'd got the information that was wanted, and I knew that if the people who wanted it thought they were going to be saved fifteen thousand a year by getting it, then I ought to be able to sell it pretty well, provided that I went the right way about things. But, of course, I couldn't very well go round into that room and tell the man there that I'd been listening to what he was saying; and, moreover, I didn't want to deal with solicitors at all if I could help it. I wanted to go to head-quarters."

"But you didn't know who that was, did you?" asked Jim.

"Not at that moment," replied Lush. "Up to this point I had only heard him referred to as 'old Thingumbob,' which of course wasn't much help."

"What did you do about it then?" enquired Jim.

"At that moment a clerk came into the waiting-room," said Lush, "and said that Mr. Bridger would see me now. I followed him into the next room and there was voice number one seated in the flesh at a large writing-table. As I came in he said, 'Excuse me just one moment,' and then turning to the clerk who had brought me in, he handed him a grey file tied up with pink tape. 'Just send this down with the other papers to Mr. Edward,' he said."

" ' Yes, sir,' said the clerk, and you can bet your life that I did my best to catch a glimpse of the cover of the file as it was handed from one to the other, for I guessed that these were the papers that voice number one had just promised to send to voice number two. I was straining my eyes, but that wretched clerk took hold of the file with his thumb over the part where I made certain the name would be, and though I got as close to him as I could, all I could manage to read was the printed name of ' Bridger and Bridger ' at the bottom of the cover.

" Then a lucky thing happened. The man at the desk spoke to the clerk again. ' And these for the post,' he said, pointing to one or two letters lying on the table. The clerk moved forward, and as he did so transferred the file from his right hand to his left in order to have the former free for picking up the letters. And in that half instant I saw the name on the cover. The next moment the clerk had passed the letters into his left hand, hiding the name again, and had turned to leave the room, while I was shaking hands with Mr. Bridger.

" He was a little stiff to begin with. I suppose I'd gone a bit out of the usual way when I'd chosen my solicitors through an advertisement in the ' Times ' ; and he wanted to know to whom he owed the pleasure of the introduction and so on. I didn't want to appear at a loss, so I gave him the name of the brokers who had done my business for me

earlier in the day. This must have been a fortunate choice, as he seemed quite satisfied and we got down to what I'd come for.

"I watched him carefully as I handed him the notes that I had prepared, and saw him suppress a start as he came to your name.

"'Do you know Mr. Grant?' I asked.

"'Well, curiously enough,' he said, 'I heard his name mentioned at lunch to-day by a friend of mine who had been dining with him last night.'

"He said no more on the subject, but I imagine that when I had heard him mention your and your uncle's names to his partner, he had been repeating something that he had been told at lunch."

"It's quite possible," said Jim. "My solicitor and I were dining together last night." A suspicion of a smile appeared in his face as he wondered what sort of account of the dinner Mr. Cash had given to Mr. Bridger.

"Well, anyhow," continued Lush, "he said my draft agreement was watertight and in form as far as it went, and I asked him if he could kindly let me know of any means by which I could get a couple of copies drawn up by a law writer in the next hour or so, as the matter was very urgent. I was prepared to pay extra, of course, for the trouble.

"He rang again for his clerk, and the latter on being asked said he thought he knew a place where they could do it for me quickly if I was ready to make it worth their while, and he would show me the way.

So having shaken hands with Mr. Bridger and discovered that he preferred a banker's reference to a cash payment (I suppose he thinks there'll be pickings in our business if he's polite now), the clerk and I went off together. The law stationers promised to get me out a couple of what they called engrossments in an hour, and as it was now half-past four I went and had some tea in a kind of Moorish cellar that Bridgers' clerk recommended. It wasn't very good, but I beat a young man there who I'm sure ought to have been working ten-love at dominoes. He wanted to have money on it, but I was afraid of the manageress.

"I'd told my car to call for me again outside the stationers at half-past five, and for a wonder the agreements were ready. I drove straight off to your flat, and the rest you know."

"Except what you did when you left me before dinner," said Jim. "But perhaps that wasn't work."

"Well, it was in a way," said Lush. "For one thing I ordered the dinner, and for another thing I established the connection between Potash and the name I had seen on that file at Bridgers', which was necessary before I could be certain that I was taking my information to the right man."

"How did you manage that?" asked Jim.

"Reference books," said Lush. "But business places being shut, I had to drive round for a bit until I could find a bookseller still open who had what I wanted.

"Mind you," he went on, "this idea again doesn't represent what I hope will be typical of our normal future business. It is just a fluke that I think it would be a pity not to take advantage of, but it doesn't really satisfy me. I would prefer something where you and I could lay our plans from the start and feel that we've really earned the profits. I would divide successful business men into two main classes," he continued thoughtfully. "The first are those who get a number of large sums of money from a few people, and includes popular portrait painters, diamond merchants and blackmailers; the second division, which to my mind contains all the best and biggest men, is made up of those whose fortunes were created by getting a number of small sums from an enormous quantity of people. It's the better business, it's more stable, and it's what we're going in for."

"You say 'we,'" said Jim; "but aren't you a good deal overrating the assistance that I could possibly be to you?"

"Where should I be now but for you?" asked Lush.

"Of course if you put it that way——" laughed Jim. "I'm sorry in a way, though," he went on, "that you're not going to try to get a lot of money from one individual that I'm thinking of. I've been warned by two different people in the last two days that it can't be done, but it would give me a good deal of pleasure to see it tried; and I must say

that after what you have done to-day, I think you are the man to try it."

"Not my line, I'm afraid," said Lush. "I suppose you mean the man who ruined your uncle, though?"

"Do you ever forget anything that is said to you?" asked Jim with a laugh.

"I have my system for remembering what seems interesting or important," said Lush modestly, "and I naturally connected your statement that it would give you pleasure to see this man lose money with the rather violent expressions that you used about a certain gentleman last night. Would it be too much if I were to ask you his name?"

"I'd like to tell it you in case you ever saw a chance of doing the brute in the eye," said Jim; "but I doubt if it would convey very much to you. I've never come across his name myself apart from this particular business. I think he must be a man who keeps rather in the background."

"I'd rather you didn't tell me if you think you might regret it," said Lush. Is there a more infallible formula than this phrase for obtaining information which is trembling on the brink? The effect was of course instantaneous.

"The fellow's name is Lloyd," said Jim. "Sir Adolf Lloyd."

"Oh," said Lush. "You don't say so! I suppose it ought to have occurred to me as a possibility, though."

"Why—what——?"

"Your name and your uncle's mentioned at Bridgers'," said Lush, speaking in a curious telegraphic style which Jim came subsequently to recognise as a sign of suppressed excitement in his partner. "Then comes Brooks. Of course."

"Of course what?"

"Of course the name on the cover of that grey file was that of Sir Adolf Lloyd."

VIII

"Tell me what you know about the man," said Lush.

Most of Jim's recent information on the subject of Sir Adolf had come to him under a pledge of confidence, but he was able none the less, without mentioning the sources of his knowledge, to give a pretty full account of what he knew. Lush heard the story of the struggle between Sir Adolf and Sir Alf with absorbed interest and without a single interruption. When Jim got on to the origin of their quarrel he pulled himself up suddenly.

"I don't know that I ought to tell you this part," he said. "After all, there may be nothing in it and I don't want to give you a wrong impression of the man if you're going to have any dealings with him. It wouldn't be much help to you."

"Something discreditable?" asked Lush.

"If it's true, it's damned discreditable," said Jim.

"Well, leave it out then. I don't want to blackmail the fellow. I'm only trying to sell him something he wants without going through the middlemen. I'll go and see him to-morrow."

"You can't," said Jim. "He's in the country."

"I thought you said you didn't know him personally."

"So far as I know we've never set eyes on each other," replied Jim; "but some people that I know went down to his place to-day to stay with him."

"Far from London?" asked Lush.

"Hampshire," said Jim.

"We'll drive down there to-morrow," said Lush.

"You may, if you like," said Jim; "but I can't."

"But I want you particularly. If you come with me you can say you were just passing and have looked in on your friends. If I once get into the house, I'll soon find an excuse for having a word alone with Lloyd. You must come."

"Can't you put it off till he's back in London?" asked Jim.

"Every day that I wait increases the chance of their putting an advertisement in the papers and some one else getting in before me with the information. You must come."

"It's damned awkward," said Jim, "but I'm afraid I can't."

And Lush, one of whose courses of training must

certainly have included a lesson on tact, left it at that.

"Well, drive down with me anyhow as far as the nearest village or town, and I'll pick you up on the way back. I've got a lot to talk to you about to-morrow."

"All right," said Jim. "I'll do that with pleasure."

"Then that's settled," said Lush.

His ex-valet's easy acceptance of his unexplained reluctance to enter Lloyd's country-house touched Jim in a way that almost made him volunteer an explanation; but not quite yet could he bring himself to speak of Mary to this strange creature. A lesser man than Lush might have put this reluctance down to Jim's hesitation to call on his friends accompanied by his ex-valet in the character of a boon companion, but I do not think that this aspect of the situation occurred to either of them. If Lush thought of any explanation he probably imagined that Jim didn't want to go near Sir Adolf at all unless he could be assured of a first-class row with him on the spot; and there may have been a certain amount of truth in this too.

All the same, there was a little pause after Lush had said, "Then that's settled," and casting round in his mind for some remark to make before bidding his host good night, which would show him that at any rate it was not mistrust that had made him fail to back him up to the full in any of his plans,

Jim bethought him of the agreement in his pocket.

"About that agreement," he said, breaking the silence.

"Yes?" said Lush enquiringly.

"I'm perfectly satisfied with it. I'm ready to sign it whenever you like," said Jim.

Clearly he couldn't have said anything which would have given Lush greater pleasure. The ex-valet beamed at him.

"I appreciate that more than you guess," he said; "but oughtn't you to show it to your lawyers first?"

"I've had enough of lawyers," said Jim. "We'll sign it now if you're ready."

"My dear fellow," said Lush, and when had Jim ever dreamt that the day would come when his man would address him like this? "My dear fellow, you and I can trust each other, I think, without any agreement. I only had it put in writing so that I could be sure you realised what I wanted you to let yourself in for."

"No, no," said Jim. "You've proved what you're worth to me, but what have I proved to you? We'll sign it now." And in his mind at that moment was no thought of the half-share in the profits but only shame at the doubts that he had let himself have during Lush's long absence earlier in the day.

"Right," said Lush. "We'll try and raise a couple of witnesses." And he rang the bell.

"And look here," said Jim, "I don't want all this money knocking about loose"; he produced his cigar-case as he spoke; "I'll keep a hundred-and-fifty for myself, and we'll put the rest back in the firm. If you're going to carry out your plans you'll need all the capital you can get."

Lush's reply, as he accepted the proffered notes, was a repetition of his parting words to Jim the night before.

"Thank you," he said. "You won't regret this."

A sleepy waiter arrived at this moment, and encouraged by Lush succeeded in producing a species of fireman from some hidden haunt. The engrossments were signed, witnessed and exchanged, and the waiter and fireman, having been suitably rewarded for their labours, withdrew.

Thus was born, late at night in a private suite at Claridge's Hotel, the firm of Grant and Lush. No champagne was uncorked, no flowers arrived, and no hardened professionals were in attendance. Yet in these quiet, if scarcely humble surroundings there first saw light a partnership which was to develop in the course of a very few years into one of the most fantastically successful business houses of modern times.

. . . . . .

"When shall I see you to-morrow?" asked Jim, after these rites had been performed and as he was hoisting himself into his overcoat.

"I'll look in for you about half-past twelve," said Lush, "and we'll motor down together. I'll see that there's a good lunch-basket on board." He stifled a yawn. "Well, good night, Grant," he added; "I shan't be sorry to get to bed to-night."

"Good night," said Jim.

He walked quickly back to the flat, and letting himself in found everything quiet and peaceful there. For a moment he meditated writing to Mary, but the thought was set aside in favour of immediate bed. The difficulties of beginning at that time of night to tell her what he had been doing were too formidable; besides, if he could only hold himself in for a bit he might yet receive that rare but immeasurably priceless gift, a letter from Mary which was not merely an answer to one of his own. After all she had promised in the cab that afternoon that she would write to him.

Darling Mary!

Ten minutes later he was sound asleep.

END OF PART TWO

ANOTHER INSTALMENT OF THIS DELIGHTFUL STORY APPEARS OVER THE PAGE

PART THREE

SATURDAY

I

ON Mrs. Pretty's arrival at the scene of her daily duties the following morning, she paused, as arranged, in the hall downstairs for Sergeant Pink's report on the general situation.

"Yus, ma," said that gentleman, "I've got a message for you. Mr. Lush came in 'ere last night. 'Tell Mrs. Pretty,' 'e says, 'I'm called away sudden,' 'e says. 'But Mr. Grant's staying on,' 'e says, 'and 'e's got a new man by the name of Mr. Chapman,' 'e says, 'and what's more 'e says 'e's explained everythink to Mr. Chapman, so you won't find nothing to worry you.'"

"Well, I declare," replied Mrs. Pretty, "I wonder what 'e's gone off like that for."

"I dunno, ma," said Pink. "But it's my belief 'e's come into money, because I asked 'im if 'e was going into another place, and 'e says, 'Never no more, Pink me boy.'"

"Well, I declare," repeated Mrs. Pretty, and after both parties had reproduced their respective shares in the above conversation with slight variations

two or three times, she stumped up the stairs and found the outer door of the flat once more open, the all-foreseeing Lush not having omitted to instruct his successor in this part of his duties.

If, however, Mrs. Pretty had hoped to enjoy a lengthy and speculative conversation with Mr. Chapman on the subject of Mr Lush's sudden disappearance, she was doomed to disappointment; since not the least of Mr. Chapman's merits as a butler-valet was an impenetrable reserve with those whom he considered his inferiors in rank, which caused him to treat Mrs. Pretty in so lofty and distant a manner that her only possible revenge was the difficult and painful assumption of a corresponding silence—a punishment which hit her much harder than the intended victim. The early morning work of the flat proceeded therefore unassisted by the exercise of the human voice.

Not that it needed any such silence to account for the prolonged slumbers of the master of the establishment. Jim had at all times the gift of the sort of sleep that no outward physical disturbance could arouse. From his earliest youth cold sponges had, so to speak, left him cold, and even the forcible removal of his bedclothes by his little fellow-students had been abandoned in disgust when they discovered that the deprivation had no effect on his powers of sleep. But though you may envy him this gift, you must at the same time pity him for losing many of the most delightful hours that can

be spent in that delightful place, Bed; for as he always went to sleep within five minutes of laying his head on the pillow and was incapable of remaining in bed for more than five minutes after regaining consciousness on the following day, he knew none of those pure and satisfying joys which are reserved for those who read in bed at night and doze in bed in the morning.

On this particular morning, as has been indicated, he awoke more than usually late; so late indeed that on his way across to the bathroom he heard the rattle of the lid of the letter-box which signified the arrival of the second post. He accordingly made a detour by way of this box and extracted from it an accumulated mass of correspondence representing both that morning's deliveries, the earlier one for some reason or other not having yet been removed by Chapman. You will see from this action on the part of our hero that he had not yet reached the desolating age at which the arrival of the morning post is regarded as an unromantic and even regrettable event. No, Jim was a true post-lover; the knock could always draw him to his own front door whatever he was doing at the time, if it was not immediately attended to by his staff, and always with the hope in his heart that romance was waiting for him in one of the envelopes. On this occasion he was not disappointed. There was an unmistakable letter from Mary. But like all true postal and sentimental gourmets he placed it below

the others to be read and lingered over last. The rest of the pile seemed to contain nothing of very great interest. Bills, receipts, and advertisements, the last-named category being easily detectable owing to the fact that the agency who sent most of them out had copied down his initials wrong originally and had never corrected their mistake.

Jim's youth will be even more accurately gauged perhaps if I reveal the fact that he invariably read these advertisements, although never by any chance considering even the possibility of borrowing the money, buying the goods, or subscribing to the causes to which they drew his attention. Advertisements, however, came after Mary's letter, and were accordingly dealt to the bottom of the pack, thus causing Mary to rise considerably. The outsides of the bills and receipts were then inspected and their contents estimated by this not unusual means, after which they were laid on one side. There now appeared at the top of the pile a letter in a strange handwriting, marked 'Personal.' The outside of this was also carefully examined, but yielded no very definite results. The postmark was "London, W. 1." and taken in conjunction with the "Personal" a money lender seemed a not improbable solution. On the other hand the writer had got his initials the right way round, and the handwriting did not look like that of the professional envelope addresser. Perhaps on the whole the best thing would be to open it.

The letter proved to be from the chemist to whom Jim had sent Chapman on the previous evening, and ran as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,

"I hope you will pardon the liberty I am taking in writing to you in this manner, but very unusual circumstances have made me do so.

"This evening you sent round to be made up at my shop a prescription for a lotion to be applied to the hair. As soon as I saw this prescription I recognised what I had hitherto regarded as a secret formula of my own.

"When I inform you that after years of experiment I have just arranged to embark the savings of a lifetime in placing this mixture on the market as a remedy for indigestion and other similar functional disorders, you will realise that this is a serious matter to me.

"I would not trouble you in this, if it were not that having dealt with me, I trust to your satisfaction, for a number of years, you may, I feel, be willing to come to my assistance now in what cannot be of very great importance to you, though it is of the very highest importance to myself.

"Briefly, dear sir, I would beg of you to let me know the name and address of the practitioner who gave you this prescription. The initials, which appear to be "H. L.," are not in the writing of any doctor who has hitherto prescribed for you, and as

there is no address on the note-paper on which it is written I have no clue to the identity of the writer.

"I am naturally most anxious, if this has not already been done, that the formula, which is of a very unusual nature, should not be given indiscriminately into the hands of numerous chemists, as this would seriously injure the otherwise excellent chances which there are of my making a very good thing out of my mixture when it is put on the market next month and when the money that I have sunk in advertising begins to produce the hoped-for results.

"If you will kindly excuse this letter and be good enough to let me have the name and address of the doctor who wrote this prescription for you, it is my intention to get into direct touch with him in the hopes that some arrangement may be reached by which the very great amount of time and money that I have spent in this matter may not be altogether wasted.

"Thanking you in anticipation,

"I beg to remain,

"Yours obediently,

"THOS. C. PARKYNS.

"P.S.—I enclose a copy of the printed matter which I was proposing to send out with each bottle, as evidence of my bona-fides."

The enclosure was headed, "PARKYNS' BILIO-WATER, The ONLY cure for Indigestion which

assists instead of thwarting Mother Nature," and proceeded with the aid of a number of unpleasing diagrams to relate the autobiography of Parkyns; showing how for years he had suffered torments from dyspepsia; how physicians, surgeons, osteopaths, Christian-science healers and rival patent medicine manufacturers had striven in vain to give him relief; how after all these had failed and there seemed no cure but the grave, Parkyns had by chance hit on the epoch-making discovery of Bilio-Water; how the first dose had given instant relief; how after the second dose he had had his first peaceful night for over fifteen years, and how he could now eat heartily—it even hinted grossly—anything and everything that was set before him. It continued by informing the reader how on making this discovery, Parkyns had felt that nothing must stop him from sharing his newly acquired knowledge with the suffering public and so introducing a new era of peace and health into a tortured world; how with this end in view he had caused ten million bottles of Bilio-Water to be prepared, each and all of which he was prepared to sell at one-and-threepence (large size, containing nearly four times as much Bilio-Water, two-and-ninepence), which prices were considerably less than the actual cost to the manufacturer; but then Parkyns was determined that no class of society should be precluded from sharing in this miraculous discovery even if this resulted in a financial loss to the inventor. Testi-

monials, added the enclosure, were not given, but anyone interested could at any time call at the Bilio-Water Laboratories, where the expert staff of chemists would be delighted to show him a series of albums containing many thousands of totally unsolicited letters from all parts of the globe, all testifying to the extraordinary merits of Parkyns' Bilio-Water.

This last statement rather puzzled Jim, as according to Parkyns' autograph letter the stuff couldn't yet be bought; however it seemed possible that this was an intelligent anticipation, and anyhow as the address of the Laboratories was nowhere divulged, there didn't seem much chance of any one putting the matter to the test.

But what an extraordinary thing! Poor old Parkyns, what a fright he must have had when he saw Lush's prescription. Well, the letter must be left for discussion with Lush himself; he was the doctor in question and he must decide what reply should be sent.

Now for Mary's letter, thought Jim, eyeing it greedily. But no; on second thoughts, if he found it possible to do so, he wouldn't open it until he was having breakfast. As long as it was unopened one could imagine such terribly encouraging contents, and though it required enormous strength of mind to leave it like this, yet to such a past-master in the art of sentiment, the uncertainty and delicious self-torture of the unnecessary postponement brought

a kind of satisfaction which the letter itself (must it be confessed?) might well fail to give. Not that Mary's letters, like everything else to do with Mary, were ever anything but absolutely perfect, but oh, the dreadful casualness of them to a reader whose eyes were skinned to discover encouragement or signs of wavering between the lines.

So there followed shaving, with Mary's letter propped up in front of the looking-glass, and a short, but as usual exceedingly vocal bath, and then the rest of the toilet was, if the truth must be told, rather scamped. You see honour forbade that having once taken the resolution to put off reading this letter until breakfast, Jim should be false to his word; but, on the other hand, honour said nothing about not coming into the sitting-room in bedroom slippers and still buttoning up one's waistcoat as one took one's seat at the table; and honour could even, it was hoped, turn a blind eye to the exceedingly inaccurate parting on the top of the votary's head.

So in the historical atmosphere of coffee and bacon and eggs, not unassociated with Cooper's marmalade, Mary's letter was at length opened.

"My poor Jim," it began.

Well, hadn't this alone been worth waiting for? When had Mary ever before begun a letter otherwise than "Dear Jim." Such an aggravated attack of that previously described congestion in the throat and at the back of the eyes swept over the reader

at this opening that for a moment he saw no further. Not for an instant did the possibility occur to this sentimental idiot that "My poor Jim," could have been written in the affectionately contemptuous manner in which he had heard the same words spoken through the window of a taxicab on the previous afternoon.. No, this was pity, and pity was akin to—well, read the rest of the letter and see whether he had not blundered on the correct pronunciation of its opening words.

"MY POOR JIM,

"Father has told me everything and I am most dreadfully sorry about it. You ought to know I've always thought you could do anything if you really wanted to, and I am quite certain that everything will really come right for you in the end; but of course I do quite see that it must have been an awful shock and disappointment for you. I don't mean that I think you'd ever have been really content just to wait to step into your uncle's money when he died, but nobody in the world could blame you for thinking that as he had done so much for you you would find yourself very well off when this did happen. Even Father agrees with me over this part. And nobody could blame you after you did so jolly well in the war, if you wanted to take a very long holiday before you turned to anything else. Of course, I knew something had happened to worry you to death when I came to see you yesterday, but I

saw you didn't want to tell me. And again this afternoon I saw you were just as worried as ever; but I'm not the sort of person to make my friends tell me things if they don't want to, so I just waited until I'd got Father alone in the carriage coming down here, and then I tackled him.

"He used his chin at me a bit, but in the end of course he had to give in. Now Jim, whatever you may have thought I want you to try and see Father's point of view, because I know both of you a great deal better than you know each other. Apparently the poor dear had got it into his head that you had been playing fast and loose with my young affections for some time; this being the only sort of explanation that gentlemen of his age and character can think of when they see two young things playing about together and not immediately getting engaged. So when he heard in the City yesterday morning that your uncle had died worth practically nothing at all, he seems to have thought, 'Now I will be cruel to be kind; the time has come for me once more to project my chin, put my foot down and rescue my innocent child from the clutches of this fortune-hunting Lothario.' I'm very sorry to have to make my parent out to be such a hopeless idiot as I seem to have done, but you see this really is the way that the poor old thing's mind works, and in spite of it all if you only knew it he is really a dear. Of course I told him at once that he'd got hold of the whole thing quite wrong from beginning to end,

and that we were only jolly good friends and always would be, and if you believe me in less than ten minutes he was saying how he would try and use his influence to find you a job somewhere and how disgraceful it was that the country didn't look after its demobilised heroes.

"Knowing Father as I do, I didn't quite like to say straight out, 'Then I may ask the young man to the house again, mayn't I?' because nice as he was being it never quite does to try and get him to withdraw any pronouncement of this kind once he has made it. However, I think you can take it from me that if nothing more is said everything will be all right, especially as we are to be down here for about a fortnight and so couldn't meet anywhere for a bit.

"Meanwhile cheer up, because in the first place I know you will get on like a house on fire the moment you really try to, and in the second place I am going to make Father be as good as his word in helping you. Write and tell me what your plans are. I quite forgive you for being so like a hero in a book and not telling me anything when I saw you, though I should have been really annoyed if I hadn't known that sooner or later I could get it all out of Father.

"Everything is terribly rich here. Wonderful brand-new house. Party is only ourselves at present, but more are expected. There is a most unpleasant son-of-the-house whom I have met once or twice in

London who will have to be kept in order—otherwise I adore the luxury, and the world having been made safe for democracy have no objection to my host's uncertain origin. I don't believe I told you his name. He's a friend of Father's, called Sir Adolf Lloyd.

"As always,

"MARY."

Here was the real Mary on paper. Poison and balm inextricably mixed, but the latter so comforting that one had to swallow the poison however much it hurt one's inside and however ill it made one feel. Could anyone else have been so exactly right in their sympathy? But why that horrible "I told him we were only jolly good friends and always would be"? Again, could anything be more adorable than the last three words of the letter? But, on the other hand, how on earth could she imagine that he could let her father help him?

He read the letter through six times straight off. About the fourth time it suddenly struck him that the unpleasant son-of-the-house must be the Harry of Mr. Croft's story. Very well then, damn Harry! So Mary had met him once or twice in London, had she? And in spite of her very clearly expressed distaste for the heir of the Lloyds, insane and overpowering jealousy shook Jim so that he spilt his coffee on to his trousers. How dared the brute live in the same house as his adorable, perfect, wonder-

ful Mary? He'd go straight down and pull his beastly nose.

But by Jove! he *was* going down to Odiham, and this very afternoon. And now could there be worse torment after Mary's marvellous letter than to be within a few miles of her and not to be able to see her? For, unfortunately, nothing in the letter made a call from him at New Court any more of a possibility.

Well, anyhow, bless her precious heart. He'd work like a nigger at whatever Lush suggested all the next fortnight and he'd show them all that he couldn't be downed. His out-thrust jaw and the look of determination in his eye would have stopped any Mephistopheles who happened to be present from jeering at the ease with which he seemed to have fallen on his feet. When Jim looked like that one realised why Lush had chosen him from all others as a partner.

Meanwhile breakfast and the morning papers having been dealt with, Jim returned to his bedroom to complete what had hitherto been lacking in his hasty toilet before his partner should arrive. When he came back into the sitting-room a few minutes later, however, he found Lush in one of his armchairs reading the City page of the "Times" and smoking a cigar. They greeted each other.

"The only thing that makes me nervous in coming here," said Lush, "is Mrs. Pretty. If that woman were to come in here and see you and me talking

together like this, the news would be all over the West End in twenty-four hours, and that won't do. It's not snobbery, Grant, in me when I say that I want our previous relations kept dark; it's merely business foresight. The actual circumstances are too unusual for us to face the amount of unnecessary talk that there would be if it got to be generally known, and we shouldn't be taken seriously. I'm not afraid of meeting your friends, because I'd guarantee that if I come out in brown shoes and a grey tie and leave off my servant's expression, not one in a thousand of them would recognise me even in this room. But Mrs. Pretty wouldn't be so easily taken in."

"All right," said Jim. "I'll get another housekeeper."

"You couldn't have taken a decision like that ten days ago," said Lush. "I hope you don't mind my saying so, but it just shows me that I wasn't mistaken in your capabilities. However, as a matter of fact, I've arranged it all for you."

"Better still," said Jim. "What have you arranged?"

"I've had a word with Pink downstairs," said Lush. "He's a good man. You can trust him. He thinks I've come into a legacy, but he won't blab. Well, he knows of a party in the flats opposite who's been wanting a housekeeper badly for some time. He'll pay better wages than you've been giving Mrs. Pretty, though those were more than

she deserved. Pink hasn't told her before, because he didn't want to do anything to put you out, but he'll tell her in the morning, and she'll give you notice the same day."

"I see," said Jim. "But who's going to cook my breakfast?"

"I hadn't forgotten that," said Lush. "You're going to have Mrs. Chapman."

"Oh, there's a Mrs. Chapman, is there?"

"Yes. She's coming in to-morrow afternoon and I think she'll suit you very well. A married couple is what you've really always wanted, only up till now I haven't liked to tell you. And these two are as good as you can get. They couldn't take *me* in."

"Oh," said Jim. "Thanks very much." There was nothing more to be said.

"Now," resumed Lush, "if you're more or less ready, I think we might be making a move. I've got the car outside."

"Just a minute," said Jim. "There's something that I wanted to show you. I don't quite know how to answer it." And he handed Lush Parkyns' letter.

To his surprise Lush took from his pocket a large pair of tortoise-shell spectacles and carefully adjusted them on his nose.

"Plain glass," he said, taking the letter. "I got 'em in Bond Street just now. There's nothing like tortoise-shell glasses for carrying off any unavoidable defects in one's get-up. I meant to be

found reading your newspapers in them just now, but the thought of Mrs. Pretty made me forget. I'll just practise with them a bit now, if you don't mind."

"Not a bit," said Jim. "I'm so pleased to hear of your forgetting something for once."

Lush grinned appreciatively and proceeded to read the letter.

"That's a very odd thing," he said, when he had finished reading it. "I don't know anything about indigestion, but I do know that I cured my own tin-hat baldness with this very stuff. The idea came to me after reading an article on the follicles in a medical dictionary."

"Yes, it is a bit odd," said Jim.

"But now I come to think of it," continued Lush, disregarding this interruption, "I really don't see why it shouldn't be jolly good for indigestion as well. You see there's oil in it, and there's a harmless stimulant and even a little pepsin, and it's all vegetable matter. No, by Jove, the more I come to think of it, the more I see what a dashed good thing it would be for the inside. I'll tell you what," he went on, tapping the letter as he spoke, "do you mind turning this over to me to answer? Send the man a formal acknowledgment if you like, but say that you've handed his letter on to the writer of the prescription to deal with. I'll go and see old Parkyns, and if he's the man I take him for (for though I agree that his letter is a bit weak, this

enclosure is the right stuff) we'll put some money into his scheme. Don't you see," he continued with growing enthusiasm, "if he advertises and sells the stuff for himself as Bilio-Water and for us as a cure for baldness, the manufacturing expenses of each will be cut down enormously, as all he's got to do is to wait to put the labels on until he sees how the orders come in. If you like, you can put a drop of scent or colouring matter into the hair lotion; just something to reduce the risk of anyone catching on. Why it's the greatest idea since they first thought of selling ink and fountain-pen ink in different bottles. If Parkyns doesn't see it, he doesn't deserve to have his secret kept. We shall want a good name for it, of course."

"What about 'Lusho'?" suggested Jim.

"No," said Lush. "This is a side-show. Don't want any of our names coming into it. We want something gentlemanly, something West-endish. Men are far more afraid of going bald than women are, because every one knows when a man is wearing a wig. We'll call it 'Parkyns' Albemarle Tonic-Lotion'—no, I've got it, 'Dr. Ransome's Albemarle Tonic-Lotion. Keeps the Scalp Young. As supplied to the House of Lords.' That's the kind of touch we want."

"Yes, but who's Dr. Ransome?" asked Jim.

"I haven't the faintest idea," replied Lush. "It's a good name, though, and it ought to go. You leave it to me."

Well, of course Jim left it to him, and the profits on the partners' share in Bilio-Water and the Albemarle Tonic-Lotion to-day are such that he has never had reason to doubt but that Lush handled the negotiations with Thos. C. Parkyns in the best possible manner.

"Anything else?" asked Lush, when this little matter had been dealt with.

"No, that's all," said Jim.

"Well, supposing we start, then. I've got a lot of food and drink in the car and I thought we'd stop somewhere on the road down and have lunch out of doors. I've no very great opinion of post-war hotel meals on the roads out of London."

Jim couldn't help looking a little surprised at the experienced air with which Lush made this critical pronouncement.

"Ah," said Lush, "you're wondering how I know that. Well, there isn't much one can't pick up at the Valet's Club, you know. I shall be cutting myself off from a very valuable source of general information indeed when I resign from that, as I shall have to now, I'm afraid.

"Perhaps they'll make you an honorary member," said Jim hopefully.

"Well, I think they ought to," replied Lush. "But the committee are pretty strict, and there's not much ambiguity about the rules, I'm sorry to say. You see I drew them up."

"I see," laughed Jim, and having clothed him-

self in suitable outer garments, he followed Lush out of the flat and down the stairs.

In the hall Sergeant Pink, glittering with medals, in the full dress of the corps of commissionaires, gravely saluted them both as they passed through into the street.

II

Considerations of space and regard for the patience of the possible reader must clearly prevent this story from becoming a record of the business activities of the firm of Grant and Lush. Were anything of this description to be attempted, this volume would, even with the most agonizing type and the thinnest of paper, reach a thickness and weight which would make it impossible for any but the strongest subscribers to carry home from the circulating library, while its unwieldiness would necessarily prevent it from occupying any of those carefully balanced eminences on railway station bookstalls from the summit of which it might tempt such travellers as have still any money left after paying for their ticket. In these matters the Publisher's word is law, and so although nothing would give me greater pleasure than to tell you all the plans and schemes discussed between the partners as their car bore them through the pleasant roads of Surrey, I must postpone doing so until

some other occasion, since none of these plans or schemes bore fruit within the period of time covered by this particular volume.

I feel that I must, however, before proceeding, deal with an objection which I am conscious has for some time been lurking at the back of the reader's mind regarding the morality of this story. "This is all very well," I seem to hear him say, when at length rendered vocal by the growing sense of wrong under which he feels himself to be suffering, "but I'm not at all sure that I can give my approval, which has been trained in the stern and undeviating moral school of a thousand and one popular novels, to the character of the hero in this book; for I suppose you mean your Mr. Grant to be the hero. I admit that you have a perfect right to make him suddenly fall from the possession and prospect of great wealth to the certain anticipation of immediate poverty. No novel-reader can object to this. The thing has been done hundreds of thousands of times before, and generally a great deal better than you have done it. Nor should I object if having caused this misfortune to happen to your hero, you then made him recover his fortune by becoming a bushranger, a gentleman-thief, or even a blackmailer (of carefully selected persons). For here again the particular standard of morals by which I, as a novel-reader, judge the heroes of novels would allow him (provided that he were successful in any of his nefarious careers) to leave the court without a stain

upon his character as hero. Further, I do not really object, though I am bound to say that I consider this portion of your story extremely far-fetched and improbable, that you should cause him to enter into this species of partnership with this very unconvincing and unlikely character, Lush. But, my dear sir, surely even you must see that it is against all the canons of this class of literature that you should in the first place let your hero go through a period of misfortune of considerably less than twenty-four hours, and in the second place (and this is the more serious charge) that you should let him stand by and take half the profits while this impossible valet of yours does all the work, for if you will permit me to say so, that is what you have been doing. As I have said, I have no objection to your hero being entirely dishonest; that I can and almost certainly will admire. But active in some way he must and shall be and to some slight extent the controller of his own actions, or he is no hero for me." And with these words the reader shuts his mouth with a snap and somehow or other manages to convey the unspoken threat that if I'm not very careful he'll hand this book back to the young lady at the library to-morrow morning at latest, and that he will remark as he does so, in a loud tone of voice, that it is balderdash.

For the moment, I admit, this attack has rather taken my breath away. My first impulse, which is to reply "But I never said that Mr. Grant was the

hero," is checked by the sudden recollection that somewhere or other (there may be even more than one place) when I had got rather tangled up in my syntax and had been driven into a grammatical corner from which it seemed impossible to escape without using the word "Jim" five times in one sentence, I purchased my freedom at the cost of describing him by the synonym, "our hero." Better writers than I have used this phrase, though I will not definitely say for the same reason, but at any rate it's done, and nothing on earth will induce me to return again to that awful sentence and try again to re-write it in some other way. Far better have it out with the reader here and now.

Well, gentle sir or madam, leaving on one side the very debateable point as to whether anyone can truly be said to control his own actions, would it be any use for me to foreshadow how, though possibly in the early days of the partnership Jim's assistance was chiefly confined to the provision of half the firm's original capital and the careful introduction of Lush into those strata of society in which the latter's schemes might best flourish and blossom, yet as time went on and his confidence grew he came to take a more and more prominent part in the planning and execution of the firm's financial coups; how he even came eventually to find that he possessed a strange and unexpected *flair* for the higher accountancy; how the undoubtedly great gifts of his late maternal uncle which had been so long lying

dormant in the nephew were developed by practice and the encouragement of his partner to such a pitch that it is hard to say to-day whether Grant or Lush is the more important figure in their joint business? Would all this be any use?

"No, sir," roars the reader in reply. "It would certainly not be the slightest use. My wife and I demand activity from the hero of any book which we are good enough to read in that book itself and not in any unpublished (and, if the truth were known, probably unpublishable) sequel."

"Very good," I retort, now thoroughly roused by this taunt. "You ask for activity. Then stand clear from my typewriter, for by Heaven you shall have it!"

III

Although the car in which Jim and Lush were bowling along was a hired one, Lush had arranged somehow or other that he should on this occasion drive it himself. And though he admitted that his knowledge of the science of automobilism was more theoretical than practical, they proceeded without any disaster out of London through Kingston and Staines as far as Egham. Lush drove with a superb outward appearance of confidence, but added years to Jim's age during the journey by murmuring to himself, "Now let's see, which is the brake?"

at the top of various declivities, and once, "Is that little thing the spark or the throttle?" at the same time, without pausing for a reply, pushing the little thing in question violently through most of the arc in which it travelled. As they were proceeding very slowly behind a hearse at the time, it was fortunate that Lush's luck had caused him to select the former of the two alternatives. But even when his luck temporarily deserted him, no one but his fellow-traveller could have guessed it. When, for instance, on entering Egham he accidentally let the engine stop, and when, Jim having obligingly restarted it for him, he unintentionally put the gears into reverse, even the policeman who paused to watch them thought that this must have been done on purpose, when he saw the calm and philosophic countenance of Lush proceeding rapidly backwards along the road.

He managed to stop the car before it hit anything, but after this incident he decided to hand the wheel over to Jim, giving as his reason the necessity of preserving a cool and unruffled exterior in view of his approaching interview.

Jim was too much relieved at the exchange to point out that his companion was far the cooler and less ruffled of the two, and after this they continued the journey more comfortably and normally in the direction of Bagshot. Before reaching this town, however, they turned off down an inviting lane with broad green strips on either side, and, drawing up

on one of these, extracted the lunch-baskets. Lush had employed both his professional experience and his newly acquired wealth in filling these baskets, and the day being extraordinarily fine, Jim admitted that he had never enjoyed an alfresco meal more. The lunch naturally was cold, but so was the pre-war hock, and at the right moment, from a thermos skilfully manipulated by Lush, two cups of the most delicious coffee were duly poured. Jim's contribution was confined to cigars, and the cushions from the seats of the car having been placed on the grass, both travellers spent a delightful quarter of an hour lying on their backs and looking up through the green English trees at the summer sky. Conversation languished, and their digestive siesta was undisturbed save for distant and soothing country sounds. Even the local flies, disliking the aroma of the cigars, confined their attention to the remnants of the lunch, over which they buzzed and revelled with a sound so soporific that one at least of the travellers cannot be certain that he did not lose consciousness for a brief period. At half-past three, however, Lush sprang to his feet, and this rousing Jim, they both set to work to repack the debris of their feast and to replace the cushions in the car. Jim again took his seat at the wheel and they backed as far as the high road, where they resumed their journey.

Through Blackwater they sped and at Hartley Row they turned off to the left to take the road to

Odiham. And then, as they were speeding along the King's highway, drawing rapidly nearer to their destination, there was a sudden hiss from the back of the car followed by an immediate and unpleasant change in their hitherto smooth progress. Jim slowed up and looked out over the side.

"What's up?" asked Lush.

"I was afraid so," said Jim. "Back tyre's gone."

"Damn!" said Lush.

"Ditto," said Jim, and turned the car in to the side of the road, where he stopped it and jumped out.

"Can you fix it?" enquired Lush.

"I can fix it all right if they've got the tools on board," said Jim. "But it'll take some time and I shall get in the hell of a mess. It's rather an old-fashioned sort of spare-wheel."

"Well, I'll help you all I can," said Lush. "But I mustn't get oil and dust all over my hands and face if I mean to get a good price out of Sir Adolf. I wonder where we are?"

"Not much more than a couple of miles from Odiham," said Jim. "We passed a milestone some way back."

"I don't want to be there later than half-past four," said Lush. "If I turn up about then it'll be all right, but if I get there after business hours he'll think I'm desperate for money and I shan't do nearly so well. This thing has got to be as between two business men, you see,"

"Look here," said Jim, punching the spare wheel as he spoke. "I believe this brute's gone too. They'd no business to send the car out in this condition."

"You're quite right," replied Lush. "I remember now, the chauffeur told me he'd had a puncture on the way to Claridge's this morning and that was why he was late. I say, old man, I'm awfully sorry, but I think I shall have to try and walk there. I wonder which side of the town the place is."

"I see they've put a repairing outfit in," said Jim, rummaging under the driver's seat. "I can mend the puncture all right, but it'll take a dashed long time. Let's ask this chap where New Court is. Hi!" he shouted, as a man on a bicycle with a blue enamelled jar dependent from the handle-bars approached them.

The bicyclist stopped himself and remained with one foot on the ground apparently ready to take instant flight should either of the strangers prove dangerous.

"Do you know where New Court is?" asked Jim.

"Eh?" said the bicyclist.

Jim repeated his question.

"Noa," said the bicyclist and forthwith resumed his interrupted progress, the enamelled jar clanking against the framework of his iron steed as he passed into the distance.

"No one in the country," said Lush, "ever knows

the name of any house except by the surname of the last occupant but one."

"That is a very just observation," replied Jim, "but unfortunately in this case I believe the present occupant built the house."

"Then unless the postman comes by, we're done," said Lush.

But they weren't quite done, because just at this moment an aged fly came rumbling round the corner. The front half of the lid or roof of this ancient vehicle was up, so that it was impossible to see as it approached whether it was occupied or not, but after all it was the driver who would be the most likely to be able to help them.

It was Lush who shouted this time.

"Hi!" he said.

There was no need for the fly to stop or even to slow down, for though the horse was oscillating and reciprocating between the shafts in a wonderful way for such an obviously aged animal, it cannot have been covering the ground at much more than two miles an hour.

"Can you tell me where New Court is?" continued Lush.

"Eh?" said the coachman.

Lush obliged with the necessary encore.

The coachman pointed with his whip over the hedge to a prospect which was invisible from the lower elevation on which his interlocutor was standing.

"Up there," said the coachman in a dialect for which phonetic spelling has not yet provided a satisfactory means of transcription.

"How do I get there?" asked Lush.

"First gate on the left," said the fly-driver. "Watch where I turn."

"Thank you," said Lush and Jim in chorus, and stood watching where the fly would turn off. As it passed they both looked into the inside of it. The back or more comfortable seat was unoccupied, but seated on the smaller seat with her back to the driver and consequently under the raised portion of the top of the vehicle was a woman. Her choice of position, though it would be regarded as eccentric in a man, is by no means an uncommon one for women to adopt when they fear that the rude elements might otherwise disturb their hat or their hair. True, the elements were on this particular day balmy to a degree, but then could this mouldy old fly ever have borne a fare with a more elaborately dressed head? A white veil partially obscured her features, but above this rose the feathers of some rare and bright-plumaged bird tossing in bountiful profusion, while a number of highly coloured curls escaped from the veil and hat towards the back of her head and were disposed with careless art in rich disarray. The rest of her costume, as far as it was visible, was quite up to the standard set by her headdress, and altogether a more unexpected and metropolitan-looking vision can seldom if ever

have been seen on a country road. Jim and Lush, I am sorry to say, completely forgetting their manners, stood and gaped, and as they gaped the cab turned off suddenly to the left and the vision was withdrawn from their view.

"In yurr," shouted the driver, waving his whip, as he disappeared from sight round the corner.

"Thanks," once again roared Jim and Lush in unison.

Then they turned to each other.

"Well, you're in luck," said Jim; "your beastly old bus has been and bust its hind leg exactly outside the place we were looking for. If we'd gone right into Odiham we should only have had to come back again. You'd better go on now and get your business over and I'll tackle the tyre in the meantime. And if anyone says, 'Would your chauffeur like something to drink?' mind you don't refuse the offer. Why, what's the matter?" he added, as Lush made no move. "Feeling nervous?"

"No," said Lush. "I was thinking what a rum-looking visitor that was in the fly just now."

"I expect that was the new kitchen-maid," said Jim. "You'll probably meet her coming out again with a month's wages in a few minutes."

"No box," said Lush laconically.

"Probably lost it," said Jim. "They generally do."

"Those clothes were vile," said Lush, "but they cost money. I know that much."

"Well, I give it up then," replied Jim. "But all the same the curious thing is that I feel certain I've seen her before somewhere."

"You ought to know," said Lush. "You couldn't see a woman like that and forget it."

"Ah, but perhaps she wasn't dressed like that," answered Jim, and as further discussion on the point seemed likely to prove unprofitable the subject was dropped.

"Well, never mind," said Lush. "Anyhow I'm going in now. Wish me luck."

"Any instructions?" asked Jim.

"No," said Lush. "I'll be out again before you've finished that tyre, I expect. If I'm not through in an hour I'll have a message sent out to you."

"Very good, sir," said Jim, saluting with a large spanner, and immediately wondered whether this kind of joke mightn't be considered in bad taste by his ex-valet. However he needn't have worried, as Lush only grinned cheerfully and began walking towards the turning where the fly had left the main road.

"Do I look all right?" he shouted back as he reached the corner.

"Beautiful," yelled Jim, flourishing the handle of the jack in the air in an encouraging and enthusiastic manner.

The next moment Lush also had disappeared,

IV

There followed a hot and laborious period for Jim, during which he removed his coat and waistcoat, rolled up his sleeves, jacked up the back axle of the car and set to work with tyre levers and spanners and all the paraphernalia with which the repair of a puncture is associated. Fortunately he was spared the crowd of spectators with which he would have been surrounded if the operation were being performed in a town or village, for although he was on the high road the only witnesses of his labours were the occupants of various horse-drawn or mechanically propelled vehicles, none of whom seemed to think it worth while to delay their progress for the purpose of staring at a hot and dusty young man struggling by the roadside with the implements of the chauffeur's craft.

At length the inner tube was gingerly withdrawn, the puncture in it located, the proper surgical dressing applied and the whole scene of the operation besprinkled with French chalk. With a grunt of relief Jim straightened his back and surveyed his handiwork with satisfaction. With considerably less satisfaction he regarded the dust with which he had been freely powdered by passing vehicles and the very unpleasant mixture of dirt and grease with which his arms were covered up to the elbow. He drew his hand across his brow and left a streak of the same mixture there, and as work on the tyre

had necessarily to be suspended while the rubber solution dried, began hunting about the pockets and recesses of the car for something with which to wipe himself. But whoever had been responsible for selecting the accessories for this particular car seemed to have been strangely remiss in providing any of those filthy masses of rag or cotton waste which one might reasonably have expected to have found concealed somewhere about the premises, and in an emergency can sometimes be forced to remove slightly more dirt from the human form than they deposit in its place.

At this moment a sound which had for some time been in Jim's ears without his consciously realising it, suddenly took on a fresh and welcome significance and caused him to begin peering through the hedge at the side of the road in obvious search of something. The sound was in fact the summery murmur of running water, which, hitherto merged in the general gentle noise of the hot countryside, now seemed to issue a distinct and personal invitation to Jim to come and lave his toil-stained limbs in its cool and clear flow. The invitation became more pressing every moment that he stood listening to it and every moment the thought of plunging his face in that deliciously bubbling stream seemed more irresistible. He gave a look at the car. Well, no one was going to drive off with a car, even in these days, when the back was jacked up and one of the wheels was still gracefully draped in its own

inner tube; certainly not at any rate without his hearing their efforts to do so. He cast an eye on the portable property on the back seat with a view to appraising its value to a receiver of stolen goods, and the sight of the luncheon baskets drove this thought out of his head by suggesting how useful one of the table-napkins supplied with them would be now, if used as a towel. To think was to act; and in another moment he had seized one of the napkins by a projecting corner, whisked it out of the basket and was down in the ditch by the roadside seeking an opening in the hedge. A very few yards to the left he came on a narrow tunnel through the bottom of the hedge which bore the appearance of having been constructed and used by some species of smaller mammal for reasons of its own. The actual opening was no larger than Jim's head, but it was clear that purposeful and efficient wriggling would get him through in a very short time, and into that hole he accordingly dived. The hot sun beat down upon a deserted road as the last of his brown shoes disappeared into the undergrowth.

A few moments later he again arose to his feet, still firmly grasping the napkin in his hand. He had acquired in his passage through the hedge a heavy crop of twigs, dry grass and pine-needles, but he decided to postpone any attempt at the removal of these until he had washed his hands in that stream and dried them again.

For there it flowed, a little, gentle, innocent

rivulet, meandering peacefully between steep close-shaven grass banks across the middle of a lawn surrounded by yew hedges. A path of flat irregularly shaped stones crossed the lawn from an arch cut in the yew and led to a little, almost semi-circular bridge with red-lacquered hand-rails which served as the backs of two red-lacquered seats. Keeping back for the moment in the edge of the shrubbery into which he had emerged from his tunnel, Jim drank in the cool and gracious scene with a pleasure heightened by the contrast which it presented to the derelict and dusty motor which he had just left on the road. He listened carefully to try and catch the sound of any voices in the neighbourhood, but all was silence save for the stream and the deep buzz of an occasional bee-errant. He stepped out of his temporary shelter and looked again at the tiny river. Seen close to, it was more tempting than ever. Only a few inches deep it purled and bubbled over a bed of smooth round stones, every one of which could be seen as clearly as through glass, but transformed by the magic of the water into a polished jewel. The Japanese bridge might be all wrong in a garden of yew hedges, but the effect of its bright red wood against the crystal water, the emerald grass and the deeper, ancient green of the hedges made as cheerful and pretty a sight as anyone could possibly wish to see on a summer's afternoon.

The intruder approached still nearer to the stream,

and as he did so a flaw in the arrangement of the little garden made itself evident. The banks of the brook were cut away so steeply and sharply and were of such an unsuitable height that although he might by lying on the brink succeed, albeit with the risk of an unpleasant rush of blood to the head, in dabbling his hands in the water, yet it would clearly be impossible for him to plunge his face right in, which was a sensation for which his whole soul now craved.

He looked along the course of the stream in both directions, but at each point where it left the little garden the banks were of the same forbidding height, and beyond the little garden he did not want to go. His eyes turned back towards the scarlet bridge, and to his delight he now saw that just at this point not only did the angle of the banks become much less steep but also that beneath the bridge these banks, though not the channel of the stream, had been widened out so that there was on each side a little concrete ledge on which one might kneel or squat almost on the level of the water. It seemed as if the bridge must have been constructed without reference to the site which it now occupied and that when it was brought to this spot and found to be too long, as it could not be made shorter, the stream had been made wider. However that may be, Jim no sooner saw these little concrete ledges than seizing his table-napkin in his hand he approached the bridge, lowered himself under it on

to the nearer ledge and was immediately stretched thereon at full length with his face plunged in the cold, fresh, revivifying water. Raising himself again to a kneeling position he splashed and dabbled his forearms as well, and then taking his napkin used it as a towel for both face and arms. The effect was wonderfully refreshing after his hot struggle with the punctured tyre, although the appearance which he presented at this moment was a very doubtful improvement on that of a few minutes ago. True a certain amount of the outward signs of his toil had been removed by his simple ablutions, but there were still streaks of black grease left in places from which they could never be removed by the application of plain water alone. Moreover his hair, which had been smooth and sleek under his cap as he had crawled through the hedge, was now ruffled and damp after its immersion; and the cap rolled up and stuffed into one of his trousers pockets, and the now anything but spotless napkin tucked into the other one, gave additional touches of untidiness to his already extremely untidy-looking costume.

However, it had been distinctly worth it, and now that that patch must have dried on the tyre he'd better get out again as quickly as possible and finish off the job. With which intention he rose from the ledge on which he was crouching and immediately fetched his head the most almighty crack against the underside of the bridge. Agonizing though the pain of this kind of blow can be, almost worse is the

sense of indignity that man (by which the sufferer means himself), the highest of the animal creation, should have hit the repository of the most complex mental system on the face of the globe with all his force against a hard, unyielding surface, when a far meaner brain could and should have warned him that it was impossible for him to rise to his feet without doing so.

"Damn and blast!" roared Jim under the bridge, tottering feebly and gropingly about in a bending position while the waves of pain throbbed through the top of his skull.

"Blast and damn!" he repeated, and was on the point of adding further words of a similar nature and likely to be even more powerful in their curative effect, when he was suddenly aware of the sound of human feet, or to be more accurate of human footwear, tapping across the stone-laid path which led to the bridge.

But for the blow on his head, justice to the sensations produced by which could still only be done by the artist of the comic section of an American Sunday paper, it is probable that this sound would have caused Jim to emerge from his retreat beneath the bridge and to face the new arrival, or arrivals, with either explanations or tips according to his, her or their social standing. Certainly no one in ordinary circumstances would have more quickly realised the misconceptions likely to arise in the mind of anyone with any business in

that garden should they discover him lurking in concealment in this generally unpresentable condition. But for the moment, though aware of the approaching footsteps, all his thoughts were centred on the crown of his own head, and as he sank again into a sitting posture, clasping his aching cranium with both hands, he was in no state to hold converse, least of all explanatory converse, with anyone in the world.

So the steps came nearer, and the next thing of which Jim was aware was a creaking over his head and the appearance of a number of obstructions in the little slits of light between the planks of the bridge. The pain was becoming a shade less unendurable, but as things were he thought it far better to stay where he was than to attempt a sortie now. The time for such an attempt had clearly passed. But confound the people over his head! Why couldn't they go on and let him get out? What on earth were they doing up there, and were they going to stay there all day?

Suddenly a voice spoke. A rather thick and deep, though youngish, voice with the faintest suspicion of adenoids in its timbre.

"Pretty here, don't you think?" it observed.

There was no audible reply to this question.

"Funny thing," continued the voice, "but I could have sworn I heard some one calling out in here just now when we were the other side of the hedge. I suppose it must have been in the road

though. That's the only drawback to this old bit of the garden, being so near the road."

As if to illustrate this remark a noisy old chain-driven motor rattled past outside at this moment, drowning for the listener underneath the bridge the sound of any answer from above. The next words that he caught were still from the same speaker.

"No, don't let's go in just yet," he was saying. "You know there's nothing to go in for and this seat's quite comfortable. Besides I want to talk to you specially."

"Oh?" said the other voice; a woman's voice; and the monosyllable seemed to convey dictionaries full of cold sufferance and polite lack of interest. But what was there about this solitary interjection that made Jim in his retreat suddenly prick up his ears, that caused him to forget in an instant the pain in his head, while the sudden pounding of his heart sounded so loudly in his ears that he could scarcely believe that it would not betray his presence to the people above him?

"Yes," said the male voice. "I want to know why you've tried to avoid me ever since you got down here last night. I'm not used to that sort of treatment, you know."

("Damned puppy!" murmured Jim.)

"Avoiding you?" said Mary's voice, as though the suggestion were quite a new idea to her. "Why should you think I had been doing that? Of course, I've not been avoiding anybody."

"Oh, look here, I say! You know you went off and wrote letters directly you arrived here last night, and you wouldn't come out with me on the terrace after dinner. And then this morning when I wanted to show you round the gardens you stuck in the first greenhouse talking to the gardener and never came out until the bell went for lunch. It's not fair, you know."

("Well done, Mary!")

"I'm sorry, but I really am interested in greenhouses," said Mary. "And anyhow you'll have lots of people to show round the garden now the rest of the party have arrived."

"I don't want to show the others round," said the man's voice. "I want to show you round. Why do you suppose my governor asked you down a day before the rest of the people, eh?"

"I thought because he wanted to talk business with mine," said Mary.

"Well, you're wrong," said Adenoids. "He did it because I asked him to."

"Oh. Why?"

The supreme lack of interest in the question would have stopped anyone, you might have thought, from pursuing the subject. But if this was Mary's object, she failed.

"Because I wanted to talk to you particularly, and I never get the chance in London," answered the man.

Some one's foot tapped impatiently on the boards over Jim's head.

"Shall we go back to the house now?" asked Mary. "I think this garden's lovely, but I want my tea."

"Oh, damn the garden!"

"Mr. Lloyd!" Mary's voice was really wonderful at this moment. Even Jim in the increasing discomfort of his concealment—for a movement on that concrete would have betrayed him—quaked at the fire in her tone. Thus could outraged womanhood defend itself against the coarse outbursts of brutal, blaspheming man. The only circumstance that weakened the impression made on the listener was his knowledge that the speaker would on any ordinary occasion have thought rather less than nothing of using this dreadful word herself. And so that was Harry, was it? He'd thought as much. Well, what would he do now?

"I beg your pardon, Miss Steele; I forgot myself," said Harry Lloyd. "But before we go back you simply must listen to me. You must have known before you came down here that I was awfully fond of you. I always have been, and I thought when you accepted my invitation——"

"You thought what?" demanded Mary in a terrible voice; and Harry, seeing that he'd made some kind of blunder, though too gross to realise what it was, dashed on again without further explanation of what it was that he had thought.

"I'm asking you to marry me, Miss Steele—Mary," he said. "I've always known you were just the sort of girl for me, and you must realise that we've got an awful lot of things in common." (A torrent of quite unspeakable though silent oaths was radiating from Jim as from some raging high-powered wireless station.) "And you know we'd have an awfully good time," continued Harry, the whole of whose proposal may be taken as an almost perfect example of how not to propose. "You mustn't think it's only my father who's well-off. I've been in the business myself for nearly ten years now, and I stuck on when all the rest went into the army, and I can tell you I've done pretty well. We'd have a good house in London and a couple of other ones wherever you liked, and you shall have all the dresses and jewels and so on that you want. I flatter myself I know the places to go to for women's things. And I'm an awfully easy man to get on with even if I don't go in for social things very much. Now look here, you've only got to say 'Yes,' and we'll go straight up to the house and tell everybody, and I don't mind saying there'll be some of the girls who've come down to-day who'll be as sick as anything when they hear the news. Now there's no need to be shy here. Just ask me any question you like and I'll tell you the answer, or if you want to think it over for five minutes I'll wait for you."

"I'm very sorry," said Mary, "but what you

ask me is quite impossible. I shan't change my mind, though, of course, I appreciate the——" she paused as if seeking the right word, and finally said "compliment. Now let us go back to the house."

But this answer did not suit her declared lover. Jim heard him crossing the top of the bridge as if to put himself in her path.

"There's some one else, then," he said, and his voice sounded thicker than ever.

Mary made no reply, but Jim would have given a thousand pounds to see her expression.

"There's some one else," repeated Harry. "Tell me; is there or isn't there?"

"I'm afraid that's my own business, Mr. Lloyd," said Mary. "Please let me go."

"You won't tell me, won't you?" almost screamed Harry. "Well, I'll tell you then. Don't think that I'm blind or that other people aren't talking. It's that young idiot Grant, and I suppose he's come to you and told you that he's come in for all his uncle's millions and got round you that way. Well, let me tell you that his uncle died a ruined man and that young puppy will have to go out into the world and work for his living like a common clerk, and much good his medals will do him then. You mayn't believe me, but I know what I'm talking about and you see what he says when you ask him." He paused, panting.

"I know perfectly well what you are trying to tell me," replied Mary. "And let me say that

after the way that you have thought fit to speak to me I shall ask my father to take me away from here to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, it may interest you to know that I look on Jim Grant as the best friend that I have got in the world, and I warn you to keep out of his way if he should ever hear how you have insulted me to-day."

Bravo, Mary! What thunders of applause you would have drawn from what a wildly enthusiastic gallery if only this scene had been played in a theatre and not in Sir Adolf Lloyd's Dutch garden. But all the same, how frantically you made the heart of your one unseen listener beat, even though he could not see the tears that you were struggling to keep back. For it must be admitted that gallantly as you played your part and bravely as you faced this unspeakable bully, your own heart was pounding away and your throat was working to keep back sobs of anger and mortification in almost too realistic a manner.

But the drama is now reaching its climax.

"Insulted!" shrieked Harry. "An insult to be offered forty-thousand a year! You—you—you call that an insult? Well, what do you call this?"

His feet took a step across the boards, there was a noise of scuffling, and then the sound of horrible thick lips doing that to which it would be profanity to give the name of kissing. A sobbing gasp from Mary and a sound like the crack of a whip told that her open palm had got home.

"You devil!" cried Harry in shrill falsetto, and at that instant a strong and still remarkably dirty hand seized the collar of his double-breasted brown jacket from behind and with superhuman strength flung him down the slope of the bridge so that he fell in a sitting position on the grass just by the side of the stone path. Mary sank sobbing on the red seat, her hands over her face, and in a moment Jim was facing young Lloyd with his back to the bridge, as the latter scrambled to his feet. His face was dirty white with anger and shock, all but the cheek which still bore the scarlet imprint of Mary's hand.

"Now then, you swine," said Jim, rather rudely it must be admitted, considering that the two had never really been introduced. "Are you going to apologize, or do you want some more?"

It is difficult to imagine what Harry Lloyd's thoughts can have been at this moment. It was for him as though the sound of Mary's blow had conjured into existence from nowhere some up-to-date and highly disreputable looking Djinn who was sworn to her service, for in no other way could he account for the sudden appearance of a dirty and violent young man in his shirt sleeves in the very middle of the little garden. Certainly he never recognised in this apparition the individual whom he had been discussing three minutes earlier. But whoever he was and wherever he had sprung from, Harry would pay him back for that jar to his system

and damage to his white trousers caused by his recent fall. Only not just at the moment.

In actual weight Harry could certainly have given away several stone to his assailant, and though he did not appear to be in the very best of training, yet you would have thought him capable, if you considered his stocky figure, of forcibly expelling his antagonist from the garden if he were to try. But the more he eyed this antagonist the less he wanted to try, even though it was very far from suiting his ideas of right and justice that any assault on the sacred person of Harry Lloyd should be allowed to go unpunished, or the assailant permitted to escape.

"Well?" said Jim, meaningly.

"What the devil are you doing trespassing here?" replied Harry. And if only he could keep the conversation on these lines it seemed as if he might at any rate achieve some dialectic advantage over this tramp or whatever the man was. But Jim paid no attention of any sort to this enquiry, and merely repeated his own original question.

"Are you going to apologize to Miss Steele?" he said, and as he said this several things happened.

For one thing Mary from her seat on the bridge suddenly looked for the first time towards her rescuer, and as she did so gave a gasp in which surprise, horror, relief, anger and pleasure seemed to have about equal shares. The second thing that happened was that Jim, finding that his question

did not meet with the instantaneous answer which in his opinion it required, advanced from his position at the foot of the bridge towards Harry, forming with his right hand as he did so what appeared to the latter a singularly unpleasant-looking fist. And the third thing that happened was that Harry, taking a sudden step to one side (whether merely to avoid the approaching fist or with some intention of outflanking the intruder and rejoining Mary, I cannot say), tripped on the edge of one of the stone flags let into the surface of the lawn. As he stumbled he gave a horrid high sound of indrawn breath and flung up his left arm.

"Don't you hit me!" he squealed, as Jim took a second step towards him, and the next moment the stumble had turned into a run. For perhaps a hundredth part of a second Jim thought that the run was only an attempt on Harry's part to recover his balance, but the next instant he realised that it was nothing of the sort, and he was after him like a flash.

With panic and a burning passion for revenge to aid him, Harry took a flying leap across the little stream and bolted for an opening in the yew hedge, and in less time than it takes to tell Jim had sprung after him and was close on his heels. So quickly had these last incidents succeeded one another that both pursuer and pursued were through the hedge before Mary's wild shout "Jim! Jim! Not that way!" could reach either of them. And so a third

figure, her lovely eyes still swollen with tears and her miniature handkerchief compressed to a hot, wet ball in her fist, joined in the chase. Like Atalanta in the first lap of her historic handicap Mary sped across the lawn, her long and fascinatingly thin legs in their white tennis stockings flashing swiftly over the green carpet.

And as she shot through the arch the little Dutch garden with its little Japanese bridge settled quietly down to bask away the rest of the summer afternoon, while the only sound to be heard was the unceasing murmur of the brook as it gurgled over the shining, polished stones on its way to the river.

V

New Court, the country residence of Sir Adolf Lloyd, J.P., was built on the site of, and to a small extent of the same material as an old Manor-house which had come into the market about 1910. To do Sir Adolf justice, in destroying the original building he had been guilty of no act of artistic vandalism, for "Beddings," as the house was then called, had been so much knocked about and added to by previous occupants that it had but little historical interest and no pretensions to looks of any kind. What it did have, however, was a very large and very beautiful garden, and practically all of this had been retained when New Court (Sir Adolf could

not bring himself to retain the old title of the estate) was built, so that the setting of the new erection was more than worthy of any jewel which might be placed in it. And though New Court was perhaps scarcely a jewel, it was certainly a very luxurious and very comfortable fifth-Georgian mansion, as anyone may see who turns up the two numbers of "Country Life" in which its beauties and conveniences are depicted and described.

At the south-west corner of this house the architect had planned, possibly with a view to satisfying some inherited tendency in his client towards the life of the Orient, a kind of open air apartment over which in fine weather a green canvas awning could be stretched and in which, also in fine weather, it was the custom to serve tea. From this garden tea-room an excellent view may be obtained first of the tennis-courts and beyond these of the sloping verdure and gay colours of the garden, while in the distance the rich countryside stretches pleasantly and soothingly away.

On this particular afternoon there were seated in this enclosure some twelve or fifteen persons of both sexes and various ages, all guests of Sir Adolf Lloyd and all more or less occupied in lazily eating and drinking. A quantity of racquets propped up against chairs and tables, and the white raiment and red-rubber soles of the younger members of the party, indicated that tennis had been going on, and their conversation still seemed mostly occupied with the

technique and the technicalities of this game. Neither the host nor the host's son were at the moment present, and as there was no Lady Lloyd (though there had once been a Mrs. Loewe), the chief tea-pot was being administered by a widowed sister of Sir Adolf, who spent a great part of the year at his houses and acted as châtelaine of New Court during his house-parties there. Among the other persons present may be noticed (reading from left to right) Mr. Metcalfe Steele, Lord and Lady Plater, Sir John Bowlby (Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Economy) and Mr. Godfrey Bridger (of Messrs. Bridger and Bridger). Although this company included much that was respectable and everything that was well-bred, it is a remarkable fact that practically everybody present would have willingly given a fair sum of money to a public charity if only Mrs. Mayer (Sir Adolf's sister) could have been spirited away, thus leaving a clear field for that most delightful of pastimes, a general discussion by the guests of a house-party on the subject of their host. To complete a picture of the mental processes at work in this assembly it should perhaps be added that only fear of her brother prevented the virtuous Mrs. Mayer from initiating such a discussion herself.

As things were, however, the elders munched and asked each other for another cup of tea, while the younger people (amongst whom may be mentioned the Hon. Ursula Plater, Miss Mercy Bowlby, Major

Bagley and Captain Kahn) bandied backwards and forwards the names of well-known lawn-tennis players and their favourite strokes.

At this moment, as Major Bagley was attempting to demonstrate with a teaspoon the Argentine method of taking a backhander, this peaceful English scene was suddenly interrupted by a high, giggling squeak from the Hon. Ursula Plater.

"Look! Look there!" she said, pointing across the tennis lawn. "What on earth is Mr. Lloyd doing?"

All eyes were at once turned in the direction in which she pointed.

"What? Where?" cried numerous voices.

"There! There he goes again!" squeaked the Hon. Ursula, and indeed at that moment the brown jacket and white trousers of Mr. Harry Lloyd were seen to dash out from behind a rhododendron and take a diagonal path across the corner of the second tennis-court at a tremendous speed. Even from this distance it could be seen that he was streaming with perspiration and was all but done in with exhaustion, but as yet there was no sign of the lion or mad dog or whatever it was that was causing him to cover the ground with such unparalleled velocity.

"What on earth——?" broke from the lips of Sir John Bowlby, as he gazed in amazement at the scene; but before he could complete his enquiry there was a crashing and crackling in the shubbery at the end of the lawn and the next instant a wild,

dishevelled and but partially clothed figure burst from the bushes and took a bee-line across the courts with the obvious intention of intercepting Mr. Lloyd's course before he should reach the safety of the house. As this figure took a hurdler's leap over the first tennis net, it uttered a wild war-whoop and the terrified Harry broke away instantaneously at right angles and headed straight for the tea-party.

"It must be a lunatic," murmured Captain Kahn.

"Or a poacher," suggested Miss Bowlby.

"Or a Bolshevik," said Lady Plater, who had become accustomed by much newspaper reading to apply this description to anything and everything that savoured of the unusual.

"Stick to it, Lloyd!" shouted Major Bagley, as Harry reached the bottom of the steps leading to the terrace.

The supposed Bolshevik had spun round after his quarry and taken a second tennis net almost in his stride, but he was still some way behind. The fact was that Harry had got a good start by having managed in the first fifty yards to slam the door of the walled garden in Jim's face at the moment when he was all but overtaken. The door having a spring lock and the handle, being on the inside, Harry had felt safe enough to pause a second or two for breath, when to his horror he suddenly saw his pursuer swarming over the top of the wall. He had turned instantly and continued his flight, his hope and

framework of the green awning. But the oddest thing of all was that even from the distance at which she was Mary could see that everybody in the garden tea-room, not even excepting Jim, had suddenly turned to gaze in astonishment at an interruption from a fresh quarter. From the open French window of the room which gave on to this section of the terrace there emerged a woman, whose garish costume, but still more whose attitude of dramatic exhilaration, caused all eyes to be instantly focussed on her startlingly dressed figure. It was the sight of this woman that had brought Harry Lloyd up so suddenly in his headlong flight, and it was towards him that she now advanced, revealing to Jim as she did so that which instantaneously recalled to his mind where it was that he had seen her before her appearance in the ancient fly earlier in the afternoon. The brilliant white uppers of her high-legged patent leather boots identified her instantly in his mind as the woman whom he had beaten in the race for a taxicab in Oxford Street the day before yesterday. And at the same moment, in a loud, metallic and unmistakably common voice, she spoke.

"Oh you Harry-boy," she said. "I've got you at last!"

So complete was this preposterous woman's command of the situation that not a single member of the party moved from his or her place as she uttered these mysterious words, but each one of them turned

as one guest to look at Harry. Only Mrs. Mayer made a feeble, ineffectual movement with her hands as though had there been a bell within reach she would have rung it.

"What does this mean?" said Harry in a voice whose obvious intention to be brusque and standing-no-nonsense was marred by his extreme shortness of breath. "Who are you? And what do you mean by coming through the house like this? Where are the servants, Aunt Rachel?" he added, turning to Mrs. Mayer.

"I'll tell you where the servants are," interposed the intruder. "They've been busy keeping me waiting in your old ancestral hall for the best part of an hour and now I've had enough of it. I'm sorry to interrupt your pleasant party, ladies and gentlemen," she added, turning to the assembly, "but I've come down here to make a nuisance of myself, and when you hear why, you'll say 'ear 'ear."

Though it was impossible to imagine any of the party giving utterance to such a remark in this unaspirated form, yet it must be confessed that there was an unmistakable look of pleasant anticipation in every countenance, and more particularly in those of the elders, which showed that this informal court of justice was more than ready to sit in judgment on any case involving any kind of closeted skeleton which might be brought before it. Circumstances seemed to have so fallen out that if

So now at this confession of her identity, though it left everybody present except apparently Major Bagley as wise as they had been before, all eyes and heads turned back once more to the intruder.

She continued her cross-examination of the gallant major, who was wishing devoutly that he had not been so indiscreet as to attempt to whisper behind his own hand and this woman's back to Captain Kahn that she had a curious likeness to a woman that he had once seen at the Tivoli.

"You've not noticed my name on the bills since the war, have you?" she asked.

"Well—I can't say I have," replied Major Bagley. "But you know I don't follow these things very closely."

"Why hasn't my name been on the bills since the war?" demanded Miss Romano rhetorically, and pausing as orators will after this question before answering it herself, was interrupted by Harry Lloyd.

"I say, I really think we've had enough of this rot," he said. "If you wouldn't mind all just going down on to the courts or wherever you like for a few minutes, I'll try and get rid of this person. I can't think how on earth she got in. I must apologise. The servants must all be asleep or something. The woman is clearly under some kind of delusion."

Put in this way it was hard for the guests to refuse to oblige their host's son, and Mrs. Mayer had already risen dutifully from her seat, when Miss Romano,

with that touch of personal magnetism with which she had once charmed unwilling and certainly unmusical patrons of the lesser music-halls into joining with her in the most imbecile of chorus-songs, now like some modern enchantress rooted every one to their seats by saying :

" Not one of you goes until you've heard what I've got to say. This isn't blackmail, though young Harry here will try to kid you it is. I don't want any money from anyone ; I only want some of his friends to know what kind of a gent he is.

" 'Ere, listen to me.

" In June of 1914 a young fellow that I'd got to know—who 'appens to be your young friend here, but who called himself Mr. Harry Lee then—asked me to go with him for a trip to Ostend. Well, I'm not a lady, you know " (she offered this quite unnecessary piece of information in no spirit of self-depreciation, but as the cold fact that it was) " and off we went. He'd plenty of money and a very gay time we had. After a month of it 'e said ' Come on to Germany ; I've got some business to do there, but you won't interfere,' and like a silly goat I went.

" Why do I say like a silly goat ? Because the war started, and there we were. No one bothered about us very much at first, but after a bit things got awkward. I kept on saying, ' let's go 'ome ; ' but he said, ' you can't go 'ome, but the war'll be over soon, and meanwhile I'll see you don't starve.' Yes, that's what he said to me one night, and the

next morning when I woke up, 'e'd done a bunk. Bolted. That's a nice trick to play on a girl. Course I'd no money, I didn't know no one and I couldn't speak German. The American consul tried to help me, but when I gave this Mr. Lee's name and address what he'd given me, and they went into it, they found there was no such place and no such person. That started the Germans after me. Swore black and blue I was a spy of course. Well, the long and short of that part of the story is that I spent four months in a damned German prison, and what's more I'd have been there still, I suppose, if I hadn't got this consul to kid them at last that I was American too. They shipped me off in a Dutch boat to the States, and I've been in vaudeville over there up till a couple of months ago, or you can bet I'd have turned up 'ere a bit sooner. Yes, without going into no details, I reckon I owe a bit of 'ell to the man who got me landed in gaol with those Huns.

"Well, of course, you all say, 'What a hugly story, but see what comes of leading a life of sin and shame.' But wait a bit. When my friend Harry Lee went off and left me in the lurch, he didn't take all his luggage. He was slipping away too quiet-like for that. Now then, Harry," she said, turning to young Lloyd. "Tell them what you left in your little suit-case, eh?"

"Has this sort of thing got to go on?" said Harry. "I need hardly say that this woman's story

is totally untrue from beginning to end. I think it would be a great deal better, if, as I suggested before, you would all be good enough to go somewhere else for a few minutes, as she won't, and I'll have her sent away."

"You're forgetting the honverlope, Harry," broke in Miss Romano before anyone could answer, seizing it as she spoke from Sir John Bowlby. She ripped it open and extracted a smaller envelope, tossing the cover and its remaining contents back on to the little wicker-table by Sir John's side.

"Exhibit number one," she said, opening the small envelope and dealing from it indiscriminately a number of picture postcards. "Me and Mr. Lee taken at Ostend in 1914."

Those fortunate enough to secure a copy of this souvenir beheld a representation of the unmistakable heads of Mr. Lloyd and Miss Romano appearing in conjunction with the bodies of two voluptuous-looking females in bathing dresses.

"We put our heads through a couple of 'oles," explained Miss Romano to the world in general, and at this point Lord Plater suddenly intervened.

"I think," he said, as he examined this curious example of Belgian art, "that the production of this photograph would make it much more satisfactory for every one including yourself, Lloyd, if you were given an opportunity of making a proper reply to the charges that have been brought against you. I can imagine nothing more unpleasant for you than

to be met with these wild accusations in your own house; but as it is a well-known fact that if anyone throws mud some of it is liable to stick, I would propose that, if the ladies will be good enough to withdraw, the rest of us should hear what you have to say. If, as I hope we shall be, we are quite satisfied with your explanation, I think I can promise you on behalf of every one that the matter will never be mentioned again."

This judicial utterance by the ex-governor raised a murmur of approval among the men and of ill-concealed disgust and disappointment among the women. Lady Plater darted a look at her husband which boded ill for him when next they should be alone together, but for once the men were in a strong position. Mrs. Mayer rose silently and entered the house, and it being impossible for any woman to find a presentable excuse for not following her, a stream of aggrieved and bitterly disappointed maidens and matrons followed her lead, to re-assemble immediately in various bedrooms where the matter could be more fully discussed. It is perhaps worthy of record that in these discussions among the women of the party only two points of complete agreement were reached, namely their unanimous condemnation of Miss Romano's appearance and character and their unanimous belief in her story.

One woman alone of the party remained behind. Mention has been made of a marble pillar on one side

of the garden tea-room which continued to shield from observation and recollection Mr James Grant. It must now be revealed that a complementary pillar on the other side of the little courtyard had for some time been performing the same office for Miss Mary Steele. Here like Commère and Compère they stood, while the final scene was played. For the moment our two principals have joined the audience, but they are so placed that if necessary they can take up their parts again at an instant's notice.

As the last of the female guests disappeared through the French window, Lord Plater turned once more to his host's son.

"Now, Lloyd," he said, "we all know that there are things that it is difficult to discuss in mixed company, but in order to put a stop once and for all to any silly talk about this—er—interruption, we just ask you to tell us straight out if you can explain what Miss—er—Romano means."

"I can't explain," said Harry. "It's a lie from beginning to end."

"And the photograph?" asked Sir John Bowlby.

"Fake," said Harry.

"Exhibit number two," broke in the impossible Miss Romano, extracting a second paper from the envelope on the wicker-table.

"I have 'ere," she continued, holding up the paper, "a letter, signed 'Harry Lee,' which he

wrote me in London before we started. Any handwriting experts present?"

"Is this your handwriting?" asked Lord Plater, showing the letter to Harry.

"It is like my writing, but it is not my writing," he said.

Metcalfe Steele now spoke for the first time.

"Before we go any further," he said, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell us, madam, at what point you reached the conclusion that your Mr. Lee and Mr. Lloyd here were the same person. I gather some time since you escaped from Germany?"

"Day before yesterday," said Miss Romano. "I saw Mr. Lloyd in the street. I nearly lost him too, because he got into a taxi and some silly blighter took the only other one in sight. I'd 'eard him tell the driver the name of a restorong though, so I came on in a bus and went in after him. There he was still, so I asked the head waiter for his name. You can bet I'd been keeping a look out for him since I got back from the States, and he wasn't going to get past me this time. I called at his house in London yesterday, but it was shut up. So I came down 'ere to-day. See?"

"I see," said Lord Plater. "It appears to be merely a case of your word against Mr. Lloyd's. In that case, supposing that he will tell us where he was at the time when you say he left you in Germany, it would go a long way towards settling the matter.

There will doubtless be numerous people who can say where he was in August or September of 1914."

"Where were you, Lloyd?" asked Sir John.

"As a matter of fact I *was* in Germany," said Harry, "though I don't know how this woman found it out. I'd gone out before the war and was very lucky to get back again. That is the only true part of her story."

"Oh, is it?" said the woman complacently. "Perhaps you will be good enough," she continued, turning to Sir John, "to read exhibit number three to these gentlemen. I found this in Mr. Lee's room after he'd left the hotel—in the suit-case—though like a fool I never caught on till I rekernised him in London just now. I think you'll find there's more in it than just my word against his."

Sir John looked enquiringly at Lord Plater.

"Is it long?" asked his lordship.

"It seems to be a letter—no, not long," said Sir John, who had extracted the remaining exhibit from the large envelope.

"Where is it written from?" asked Mr. Steele.

"It is written from this address—New Court," said Sir John. And he showed the easily recognised heavy, black, embossed heading to the others. "And it's dated the twenty-eighth of July, 1914."

"Well, let's have it," said Major Bagley.

And at this moment there emerged together from one of the French windows the forms of Sir Adolf Sigismund Lloyd and Mr. Herbert Lush.

Sir Adolf opened his mouth to speak, but at the same instant Sir John, his back turned to the new arrivals, began to read; and at the first words Sir Adolf stopped as suddenly in his tracks as his son had done when he set eyes on Miss Daisy Romano.

"'DEAR HARRY,'" read Sir John,

"'It is very important that you should start back as soon as you get this, as the situation looks very bad. If there is any difficulty, Krauss of the Kuklos can and will help you. Be careful to destroy all your papers dealing with the copperoid business, as I have already done with mine. It is definitely to be war this time, so you will see why. Burn this.

A. S. L.'"

There was a pause as Sir John finished reading this letter, and then Sir Adolf's thick voice was heard.

"May I ask," he enquired, "what you are all doing?"

Even at this moment the force of his powerful personality was enough to chill the little meeting into a guilty silence. As his small, glinting eyes passed from one to another, only omitting Miss Romano in their survey, each guest present shrank back and uttered a silent prayer that some other person would find the courage which he lacked to explain to their host what was happening. Even Miss Romano herself, though excluded from this paralysing scrutiny, seemed for the moment silenced. In

another minute unless the spell were broken it seemed likely, nay certain, that the unofficial court of enquiry would melt away, leaving father and son to deal with the intruder as they thought best.

But at this moment Compère stepped from behind his pillar and took the stage.

"I think, if you will allow me," he said, addressing himself to Lord Plater, "I can assist you with an explanation of the letter which we have just heard."

Whether owing to the fact that by this time no one present was any longer capable of being surprised, or whether owing to the unmistakably correct tones of Jim's voice, or to the general sense of relief at this fresh interruption, it is certain that for the moment his indubitably disreputable appearance did not cause anything like the sensation that it would have done in other circumstances. All eyes turned on him at once; recollections of the recent chase awoke in every mind; and if anyone had thought of looking at Lush, they would have seen an expression of brief but poignant despair appear in his countenance. From one of the younger members of the party there came a murmur of the word "Detective." Lush, standing nearest to Sir Adolf, even with his keen sense of hearing, saw rather than heard his mouth frame the caution to his son, "It's a trap. Be careful"; and as he intercepted the message, the look of despair vanished from his face and he moved a step forward to a strategic position immediately before the only open French window.

Jim had caught the first murmur.

"No, I'm not a detective," he said. "My name's Grant; James Grant."

It is difficult to say in what quarter this announcement caused the greatest sensation. Metcalfe Steele's enormous jaw dropped suddenly, and in an instant he had changed from his usually almost alarmingly impressive appearance to that of a weak-minded actor. Harry Lloyd's face became suffused with crimson as he took a step forward and remained glaring at Jim. While Sir Adolf's large, fleshy cheeks turned from their usual yellow colour to an unpleasant green tint. For the moment Jim had certainly attracted a considerable amount of attention.

"That letter which you have just read," he said, turning to Sir John Bowlby, "refers to a formula for a copper substitute invented by an Englishman, stolen from him by Sir Adolf Lloyd and used by him in his German works at Dusseldorf. The metal was largely used by the Germans for the production of munitions of war, and but for Sir Adolf's theft the invention would have remained a British secret."

"Are you aware that you are bringing a very serious charge against Sir Adolf?" said Lord Plater, recovering his judicial manner now that he had escaped the necessity of addressing his host directly. "Are you prepared to prove what you say?"

For a fraction of a second Jim paused, but before he could reply a fresh voice had interposed.

" Yes," said Lush, from his post near the window. " We are."

VI

So you see that at the last moment it was pure bluff that confounded the villains of this story. The excitement of his race and his burning desire for vengeance on Harry Lloyd had made Jim leap into a position from which it might well have been impossible to extricate himself without facing an action for slander. But this sudden interruption from a fresh quarter was too much for the Lloyds. They felt they were fighting in the dark and yet in public ; they had no idea how much their tormentors really knew and consequently at what points it would be necessary to lie ; above all they had neither time nor opportunity to agree on a joint plan of defence. Miss Romano alone they might have dealt with ; even Miss Romano plus Jim ; but when Lush said " We are " in that tone of voice, and set his mouth like a steel sphinx, Sir Adolf, for the first recorded time in his life, lost his head.

" You damned fool ! " he said, addressing his son and heir. " Why the hell didn't you burn that letter when I told you to ? "

To which parental admonition Harry replied :

" You were a damneder fool to write it."

VII

But why did Lush say "We are?"

His explanation given to Jim late that night was typical of the man.

"I had two main reasons," he said. "The first was my strong belief in the absolute and essential importance of always backing up one's partner with all one's strength whenever he comes out in the open with a definite statement, whatever that statement may be. And the second reason was old Lloyd's hands."

"His hands?" repeated Jim.

"Yes," said Lush. "You remember I was standing just behind him, and you may or may not remember that he had his hands behind his back. Well, the rapid fluttering of the hands and fingers in moments of excitement is such a well-known racial characteristic that I won't insult you by pretending that you've never noticed it. But if you had been standing where I was, and had seen his hands working when you made your accusation, you would have bet your last farthing that you had got home."

This conversation took place late the same evening at Jim's flat, but chronologically speaking we have no business to be there, our post of duty as chronicler requiring us still in the neighbourhood of Odiham.

It is unnecessary, however, to give at all a long

or detailed account of the break-up of Sir Adolf Lloyd's last house-party at New Court. The two Lloyds were left to wrangle with each other as they chose and to do their best to think of a belated defence, while their guests (including Mary and Jim) withdrew in a group to the other end of the terrace. Of course with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Economy present, not to mention Lord Plater, Mr. Steele and Sir Adolf's own solicitor, there was no chance of the matter being dropped. The last-named, alone, would have felt it his duty to his firm to probe the charge to the bottom, while Sir John Bowlby leapt at the opportunity of justifying his recent appointment in the eyes of the Premier by being the means of securing for the British public this sensational joint scape-goat and red-herring (for had not Sir Adolf Lloyd once sat in the House as the nominee of the present opposition ?) which might draw them off from their present only too obvious determination to get the Government out. Sir John's plain duty was, if the truth must be told, made considerably plainer by the fact that he had already since his arrival at New Court failed to secure the substantial loan from his host the expectation of which was the sole reason for his presence among the party. So he eagerly made notes of such supplementary information as Jim was able to provide and arranged a provisional appointment for him and Lush and (at Jim's suggestion) Mr. Croft to have a conference with those

law officers with whom he was on the most intimate terms. He chuckled as he considered the assistance which a good case of this kind might yet be to the falling fortunes of his party.

At this point a rather bewildered-looking butler came out of the house, and addressing Lord Plater said that Sir Adolf had asked him to apologise, but that he and Mr. Lloyd had just had a most urgent telephone message to go up to London and were starting in the car at once.

"That makes it easier for the rest of us," said Mr. Bridger, as the butler withdrew, and his remark was generally and correctly interpreted to mean that every one would collect his women, his luggage and his attendants, and leave the ill-fated party before nightfall. As every one except the Steeles had motored down, there was no practical difficulty in this arrangement, and the little group broke up.

"Perhaps," said Jim to Mr. Steele, "you will let me give you a lift. We've got a car outside here with a half-mended puncture, but I can have it round in twenty minutes if that will suit you."

"It's very good of you,'" said Mr. Steele. "I really don't know how else we should get to the station."

"We're going right up to London," said Jim. "If you and Mary would care to come too——?"

And to his joy his offer was accepted.

"I'll go and get the car," he said.

"I'll come with you," said Lush.

And they walked off quickly together.

Meanwhile what of Miss Daisy Romano?

After the dramatic scene at which she had just assisted, and to which, it is to be supposed, she had been looking forward for over five years, her histrionic temperament became too much for her and she bolted blindly into the house again in loud and terrifying hysterics. Here, in her attempts to retrace her original journey and find the front door and her fly, she collided with Mrs. Mayer, whose kind heart was as much touched by this exhibition of female weakness as it was secretly delighted by the check which she had scented in this afternoon's happenings to her brother's prosperous career.

She endeavoured to soothe Miss Romano's jangled system with liquids taken haphazard from the dining-room sideboard, and by judicious questioning got the whole story of her sufferings in Germany out of her again.

"But I didn't come here for money," Miss Romano kept on repeating. "I only wanted to kick up a shindy. I don't want money. I've got good friends, I 'ave; and I'm rehearsing a good part now. I only wanted to pay 'im out. I don't want his dirty money; I've got a nice flat in Maida Vale and——"

"Maida Vale?" said Mrs. Mayer. "Why, I live there too!"

I shall ask no indulgence for this coincidence, as

it is incredible that either of these two characters should have lived anywhere else, but I record it since it formed the first and strongest link in the strange friendship that sprang up between the two. After the discovery of the departure of hosts and guests later that evening, Mrs. Mayer and Miss Romano left together for the station in Miss Romano's fly; and the last time I saw the latter, which was on the first night of the fifth edition of "Muffins and Crumpets," I also saw Mrs. Mayer in a stage-box. Her loud applause and her floral tribute to the popular comédienne were quite a feature of the performance.

VIII

"Well, what have *you* been doing in that get-up?" was Lush's first question to Jim, as they started down the drive together.

Jim gave him a brief résumé of his activities since their parting.

"And what did you do with Sir Adolf?" he concluded by asking.

"We were getting on like a house on fire," said Lush, "up to the moment that you saw us come out. He was just going to give me some tea."

"If you'd thought of sending out some tea to your chauffeur," said Jim, as the last of the outer cover of the tyre slipped back into its place, "you might still be quaffing cigars with old Lloyd."

"I don't regret it," said Lush.

"Did you stick him for the money?" asked Jim.

"Yes, I did," said Lush. "But we can't keep it after this."

"No, I suppose not," said Jim. "What did he spring?"

"He offered me five hundred and I beat him up to twenty thousand. You see, I knew too much."

"Did he give you a cheque?" asked Jim.

"Post-dated," said Lush. "He was to stop it if I didn't give him the rest of the documentary evidence that I had promised him in a week."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to send the cheque on to St. Dunstan's," said Lush. "I shall write and tell Sir Adolf that I've done it and he won't dare stop it then. I'd see there was too much of a row kicked up about it if he tried that on. I shall have it announced as an anonymous subscription; that is if you agree."

"Oh I agree," said Jim, swinging the engine.

"Good!" said Lush. "Of course I'll let him have his documentary evidence as well. I'll stick to my part of the bargain."

IX

The last part of the story proper takes place in Lush's hired car on the road between Odiham and London. In the front were seated Jim (at the wheel

and once more fully dressed) and (oh, miracle of joy!) Mary beside him. A second wind-screen cut them both off from the back of the car in which Lush and Metcalfe Steele were discussing business that was subsequently to prove very profitable for both of them. At the extreme rear of the car was fastened by sundry straps and ropes Mr. and Miss Steele's luggage, or such part of it as was not disposed among the passengers' feet.

The car ran like an angel, and Lush was far too good a sportsman to draw anyone's attention to the extraordinarily circuitous route that they were taking.

"Explain!" said Mary.

And Jim did his best to explain. It took a long time. When he had finished, Mary said:

"Yes, but what I want to know is why was your friend Mr. Lush pretending to be your valet when I called on you on Thursday?"

"Oh, you noticed that, did you?" said Jim.

"Yes," said Mary, "of course I did. I call him very good looking, too. But why did he do it?"

"Would you like to know?"

"Don't be so mysterious, Jim. Of course I want to know."

"I'll tell you, if——" There was a long pause and Jim's eyes were fixed on the road ahead.

"If what?"

"If you'll answer a question."

"What question?"

"Mary, darling; I do love you so dreadfully. Why do you always say you won't marry me?"

Mary laughed.

"Shall I tell you?" she said.

This was a new move in the game on Mary's part. Never before had she said, "Shall I tell you?"

Jim looked round hastily to the back of the car. Lush and Mr. Steele were absorbed in conversation.

"Yes, please tell me," he said in a strange voice.

"Ask me the question again, then."

"Why do you always say you won't marry me?" repeated Jim obediently.

"Because you're a rich young man who doesn't do any work," said Mary. "That's why. They don't make good husbands."

"But I'm not that at all now," said Jim. "I thought I'd explained that to you. I'm not rich, and I'm going to work like one o'clock."

"I know," said Mary.

"So that reason won't wash any longer."

"No," said Mary.

Pause.

"Any other reasons?" asked Jim.

"No," said a small voice by his side.

"Then we're engaged?"

"Yes, please," said the voice, almost but thank God! not quite inaudibly.

The car slowed up suddenly and stopped.

"What's up?" shouted Lush from the back seat.

"Tail lamp's gone out," said Jim. Fortunately no one asked him how on earth he knew.

"Do you mind helping to keep the wind off while I light it again?" he said, turning to Mary.

Did she understand? She only nodded, but they both got out and went round together to the back of the car.

The tail light burnt merrily in its little lamp, throwing their two shadows clearly on the road, but they neither of them looked at it.

"You darling!" said Jim; and there was only one shadow now.

END OF PART THREE

WAIT FOR THE EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE*

THE LAST scene of this story, like the first, takes place in the hallowed precincts of the Port Club. Six weeks have elapsed. Two figures are seated together at an early lunch in the dining-room. Both are remarkably well dressed, and one is remarkably pale as well. On one corner of the little square table lies a small, conical-shaped parcel wrapped in very white paper. Does it come from a florist's? It does. Does it contain two white button-holes? It does. The pale well-dressed man suddenly begins to shiver uncontrollably.

"Better have some brandy," says the other well-dressed man.

"N-n-no," says the pale one. "Mustn't get drunk."

"A little would steady you."

"All right, then; just a little."

And the pale well-dressed man beckons to the waiter and asks for a double brandy. Charles shows no surprise at this order being given during the first course of the lunch. He has seen the two morning-coats, the shining boots, the exquisite

* Or according to Mr. Compton Mackenzie, "*Epigraph.*"

trousers, the little conical parcel on the table, and he makes the double brandy very nearly a treble one.

The pale well-dressed man takes a gulp at it.

"That's better," he says.

"You'll be all right," says the other.

"Tell me again," asks the pale one, "which side do I wait when we get there?"

"Right side; but you'll be with me. Try not to think about it."

"All right. What time ought we to start?"

"Needn't think of starting till five-past two. Drink some more of that brandy."

The pale well-dressed man obediently takes another gulp. He is perhaps a shade less pale now.

"Did Bridgers' tell you anything about the Lloyds this morning?" he now asks.

"There's to be an official enquiry. I don't see how they'll get off now. Croft's evidence will just about fix them."

"What do you suppose they'll do to them?"

"Oh, denaturalisation and take away the old man's title. It's no good trying to touch as rich a man as that in any other way. He'll lose money over it, of course, because he'll be pretty well done for in this country; but there are always places where he can go to. I think you can consider your uncle avenged this time though."

The talk began to run on business subjects.

"I've been figuring it out just now," said Lush; "and I calculate that at the present rate we shall

have made up the money we dropped over the Lloyd business by the time you're back from your honeymoon. That was a jolly good deal you put through with those advertising people when I was down at Eastbourne. I don't mind admitting that I might easily have missed the chance myself if I'd been in your place. It ought to bring in a couple of hundred a week in a very short time now."

"Can you see the clock?" replied Jim irrelevantly. "I think my watch must have stopped and started again."

"Plenty of time still," said Lush. "But if you like we'll go for a drive round in the car. It might be better than waiting about here."

"No, I think I'll wait, thank you," said Jim. "The car might run into something. I read of a case where that happened the other day, and the wedding had to be put off. But we might go down into the smoking-room."

So they went downstairs into the smoking-room. And half-way there Jim remembered that he had left their button-holes on the table in the dining-room, and running upstairs again to fetch them was met at the door by Charles with the little parcel in his hand; which caused him to blush furiously and self-consciously, so that he was no longer in the least pale when he rejoined Lush in the corner of the smoking-room where he and Mr. Cash had once spent a strange evening together centuries ago.

"You don't know what this feels like, Herbert,"

he said, as he sat down. "I suppose I oughtn't to want to do without the marriage ceremony, but I must say that at the moment I wish I could."

"I'm not the least sorry for you, Jim," said Lush; "I think you're a damned lucky fellow, and if the service lasted twenty-four hours I should still say the same. By the way," he added, and now his countenance suddenly became as deep a crimson as Jim's had just been. "I've got something to tell you."

"What?" asked Jim.

"Speaking of marriages," said Lush self-consciously and untruthfully, "reminded me of it."

"Reminded you of what?"

"I'm going to be married too."

"You're going—— My dear fellow," said Jim, shaking him warmly by the hand and increasing his embarrassment a thousandfold. "I congratulate you. There's nothing like marriage. Everybody ought to be married. I've been worrying all this time at your not being engaged. When was it settled? Who is she? Do I know her?"

"I met her at Eastbourne when I was there just after you got engaged," said Lush. "She's a most remarkable woman. In fact I think she's the only really remarkable woman I've ever met. I believe you do know her—slightly."

"Not Miss Romano?" said Jim.

"No, certainly not Miss Romano. Her name is Laura Pullman. She accepted me yesterday. I'm

afraid I shall be depriving your wife of a great deal when she leaves her."

"My dear Herbert, I congratulate you more than ever. She is a woman in a million and Mary will be delighted. As a matter of fact though, I believe she had said something about leaving anyhow."

"I wish you'd told me that before," said Lush. "She kept me waiting for a fortnight before I could get an answer, but if I'd known she was talking of leaving it would have cheered me up a lot."

"A fortnight!" said Jim. "Why, I was kept waiting two-and-a-half years. But, by Jove! I mustn't revenge myself now. It's five-past. Come on!"

THE END

Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth
William Brendon & Son, Ltd

APR 1 9 1937